

# **Electronic Information Exchange Is Critical to Closing the Gap in Health Care Reform**

## **Atlanta Physicians' Office is First in the Country to Incorporate a Complete Electronic System to Improve Patient Care**

08.31.2009 – Atlanta (September 1, 2009)— Thousands of medical practices across the United States have traded in paper records for electronic health records. While this has made improvements in patient care, an electronic health records system (EHR) is not efficient without an electronic information exchange system that can transfer information to the medical community at large. As pioneers with such a system, the Atlanta Women's Specialists solved two of the biggest issues surrounding health care reform—increasing staff efficiency and providing safer care.

An electronic information exchange system enables hospitals and physicians' offices to transfer information, including health records, lab results, surgical notes and order requests, within the medical community securely and seamlessly. The system eliminates the need for staff to manually scan medical information, which increases the likelihood of errors and diverts valuable staff resources. Traditionally, electronic information exchange systems have been difficult and inefficient to operate since most medical offices and hospitals employ different systems that may not be compatible.

Atlanta Women's Specialists, a large Ob/Gyn practice located in metro Atlanta, was the first physicians' office in the United States to deploy a system that provided both the ability to house an electronic health records system (EHR) and electronically exchange information with other medical practices, including Northside Hospital. Their system, the Medicity Novo Grid, is designed to interface with any electronic system in the medical community, regardless of the type of platform. Since Atlanta Women's Specialists' successful implementation, there are now more than 1,000 medical practices and 600 hospitals across the United States using this system.

“With this system in place, not only have we enhanced the quality of our patient care ten-fold, but we can now efficiently communicate with our biggest information trading partner—the hospital,” says Paul Barry, Executive Director at Atlanta Women's Specialists.

Hospitals and physicians' offices who operate an EHR system, wherein patients' medical files are recorded and maintained electronically, but do not have an electronic information exchange system experience more administrative challenges and can cause

vital errors in patient care. These systems, referred to as “partial EHR implementation,” use a combination of electronic and paper files. A study released in June found that one in 14 abnormal test results were not reported to patients, the highest failure rate occurring in practices with a partial system.

With the electronic exchange system in place, abnormal test results are reported to patients at Atlanta Women’s Specialists more successfully, and in rapid time—often within 24 hours as opposed to three to five days. The electronic system communicates in real time with labs and hospitals, which results in quick turnaround and fewer errors. The system also flags abnormal results, which prompts doctors to take notice and take action as soon as possible.

Additionally, physicians at Atlanta Women’s Specialists are able to send patients’ prenatal records to the hospital after each visit—something that was not previously possible. When patients arrive to deliver a baby, their records are readily available to the physician on call, regardless of time of day. This kind of accessibility is vital for expectant mothers who go into labor prematurely or who have prenatal complications.

Prior to having an electronic exchange system, administrative staff at Atlanta Women’s Specialists spent hours scanning in lab results, surgical notes, radiology reports and other incoming patient files. With the Medicity Novo Grid, in conjunction with the EHR, patients’ tests and procedures are transmitted directly into patients’ electronic files. Staff time is reallocated to other tasks, which has enabled the practice to see a higher volume of patients. And by using less paper, folders and ink cartridges, the office has cut back on supply costs.

Atlanta Women’s Specialists first implemented the EHR system in 2002. They began beta-testing with the Medicity Novo Grid in 2003, during which time the system only processed incoming information from the Northside Hospital. During the next three years, they perfected using the system to send and receive information. Currently, Atlanta Women’s Specialists is working to make the electronic system available to physicians via the iPhone and Blackberry.

“In the future,” says Barry, “we envision the exchange enabling us to expand bi-directional data sharing with the hospital, and, hopefully, other physicians’ offices.”