Cloud-Powered Virtual Health System Grows in Inglewood

By Dave Pearson

imagingBiz.com

Ten years ago, Brad Schmidt left a high-flying sales job with a major healthcare OEM to bring first-class imaging services to the underserved community of southwestern Los Angeles County. Today, that outpatient imaging enterprise performs around 25,000 screening and diagnostic procedures per year—predominantly MRI, CT and PET/CT.

All along, Schmidt's vision as a founding CEO has been to operate as a "virtual health system." He defines this as a center of healthcare excellence that doesn't need a hulking bricks-and-mortar presence to make life-changing health technologies "affordable, scalable and approachable" for the 5 million folks who live within the catchment area of Inglewood Imaging Center.

This vision has become reality. But with more than 3,000 referring physicians in the area, Schmidt says there's still plenty of room for growth.

"We are connected to seven EMRs representing about 270 referring physicians, but that is not even close to 1,500 physicians we have worked with. So we have invested heavily in EMR interoperability and image sharing."

Cloud-based image sharing and electronic health records are the cornerstones of his vision of a virtual health system.

Why become a computer compound?

It was his appreciation for EMR interoperability, image sharing and the limitless possibilities of the virtual environment that led Schmidt to look to the cloud—not only as a way to begin turning every referrer into a connected partner but also to cut IT overhead.

"I don't know why anyone would purchase IT equipment and service it in-house today," Schmidt says. "Things are constantly changing, and there are always issues with temperature, obsolescence, backup and those kinds of issues."

After researching various vendors, Schmidt selected INFINITT's Smart-NET cloud-based, single database RIS/PACS solution. It was a natural choice, as he'd been pleased with INFINITT PACS up to that point.

Brad Schmidt, CEO, Inglewood Imaging Center, Los Angeles

The decision to "go with the cloud" has allowed Inglewood Imaging to forego housing, maintaining and otherwise tending to computer hardware. It has enabled the practice to run RIS and PACS remotely and securely. And it has led to the optimization of scheduling, speech recognition, 3D post-processing and other vital processes—including clinical communications with referring physicians—all on one platform.

Now Schmidt is taking his vision one step further. This spring, Inglewood Imaging beefed up Smart-NET by adding INFINITT's Smart-LINK service. This automates electronic sending of radiological results upon final approval to any EMR, HIS, RIS or practice management system.

Innovation meets in-house invention

In true entrepreneurial spirit, Schmidt has availed his practice of many of Smart-LINK's built-in features—including compatibility with any version of HL7—while rolling up his sleeves and customizing it to fine-tune its utility and maximize the practice's ROI.

"When the final radiology report is completed, an email auto-sends to the referring doctor. There's a PDF attached. He opens the PDF with a password. The report is then shown in a very clean format. The doc clicks on the hyperlink and it takes him straight to the image." There are no extra steps for the referrer or for the imaging service.

Schmidt points to Smart-LINK's ease of use as its best single feature—and the one that made possible his innovative tailoring of the INFINITT software.

"The referring doctor can literally bypass the log-in to our PACS website," Schmidt says. "Getting to the image takes all of 15 seconds. They click on the hyperlink and launch the EMR image automatically—without any need to enter user ID, password, exam date or search criteria to locate the study.

"It's incredible what the Smart-LINK can do," Schmidt continues. "It helps create the workflow of the future, which for us is the workflow of the virtual health system."

Referrer feedback

"The satisfaction scores with our referring doctors," says Schmidt, "have been incredible."

Asked for examples of the system in action, Schmidt quickly rattles off two recent successes that surprised even him.

In one case, an orthopedic patient was headed into an OR at Ronald Reagan UCLA Medical Center when a frantic call came in from the surgeon. The ordering physician was away, and the fill-in surgeon realized he had no CD, no report and no time.

"We said, 'No problem—'"Schmidt recalls. "We sent the report and image, I called the OR with the password, and they opened it up. They had the medical report and they clicked on the hyperlink to load the image. That was probably the coolest thing we've seen so far."

The second case he recounts involved direct improvement of the patient experience.

After receiving a scan in Inglewood Imaging's MRI suite, the patient took a little extra time to get her things together and head home. While she was still on the premises, the radiologist got the image, interpreted and dictated a report, approved it and sent to the referring physician's EMR.

"That doctor happened to be on his EMR just as the patient was leaving our building," Schmidt says. "And the patient happened to have an [EMR] patient portal on her cell phone. She got notification of her results on her way out our door. She couldn't believe it."

And neither could Schmidt. "I was really pumped over that," he says.

A changing of the game

When it comes to optimizing EMR interoperability and image sharing, Schmidt says, the key product differentiator comes down to ease of use.

"It's critical for us to give our referring physicians a really good experience," he says, "and INFINITT does a great job of managing that experience. The product is easy to use and it looks good. I think that simple combination goes a long way.

As for Smart-LINK, Schmidt calls it a game-changer.

"One of the big problems in PACS is that there are so many vendors," he says. "An orthopedic surgeon might have three or four PACS vendors installed on his desktop. It can be hard to remember login procedures, username and passcode for four different systems. Smart-LINK allows the doctor to bypass all that and go straight to the images."

"We are just really excited," Schmidt says, "about the whole idea of Smart-LINK."

And the biggest beneficiaries, he concludes, are the citizens of southwestern Los Angeles County—unaware as they may be about the cloud technology behind the first-class imaging services they're getting since Inglewood Imaging Center opened its doors.