

Alliance Outlook

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Project update: New Orleans

Alliance helps pioneer shared service organization for clinic network

The Alliance has completed its work in greater New Orleans on initiatives related to the redesign of Louisiana's healthcare system, which includes using health IT as a facilitating force. The practical and promising final project, made possible by the continued financial support of Johnson & Johnson, established a shared services organization (SSO) to plan and integrate IT networks of seven clinic organizations, creating efficiencies in business operations and coordination of care.

The SSO serves a need in New Orleans to knit together the community clinics that assumed responsibility for indigent and uninsured people following collapse of safety-net services in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. The Alliance coordinated the largely *pro bono* efforts of several of its member organizations to develop interoperable information exchange among these clinics and to identify the shared technology services that would be most useful at the outset in managing their businesses and patient populations. The project also identified the executive leadership, drawn from among the participating clinics.

On a higher level, the SSO promises to be a demonstration of the value that IT can bring to a primary-care network. As such it will inform the efforts of Alliance members and the healthcare industry at large to determine an implementation strategy for ambulatory-care IT adoption that makes sense and results in tangible benefits for clinicians, patients and payers.

The work included decision-making on proper and adequate technology along with assessments of individual clinics' readiness to implement and productively use the technology. Burwood Group and IBM provided technology assessment assistance, and the Niehoff School of Nursing at Loyola University Chicago directed the readiness assessments.

The planning process and pace of progress got a shot in the arm in late May when the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services awarded a \$100 million grant to re-establish and integrate primary-care services for indigent and uninsured residents of greater New Orleans during the next three years. The grant stipulates a degree of medical coordination that would not be attainable without the integration and economies of scale of an SSO, and it gave the effort the impetus it needed to assemble a management team and select an initial set of services.

The newly named board of directors and executive committee selected a first set of deliverables:

- Revenue cycle and reporting services, including clinic-based appointments and screenings, electronic capture of data in patient encounters, centralized billing and provider credentialing.
- Technology services support, for both hardware and software.
- Care management and referral management—who sees patients with a particular condition first, where are they referred, etc.
- Outcomes measurement and reporting, to support a program of quality improvement and to collect data for retrieval by clinicians.

Definition: SSO

A common set of standardized services and products provided by an organization to facilitate business performance and outcomes through financial optimization, best practices, responsiveness and quality.