

EXCLUSIVE: Cincinnati hospitals, independent doctors to share patient records



Jan 25, 2016, 10:41am EST
Updated Jan 25, 2016, 3:08pm EST



Barrett J. Brunzman
Staff reporter
Cincinnati Business Courier

Cincinnati's hospitals and some of the largest independent doctor groups in the region plan to begin sharing electronic health records, which could lead to better medical outcomes for patients.

The development is significant considering the increasingly competitive nature of the health care business. Local hospital systems have been acquiring many independent physician groups in recent years.

The Independent Physicians Collaborative, which was formed 12 months ago by local doctor groups determined to retain control of their businesses, made it a priority to find a way to share electronic health records with hospitals.

The DirectMessage system that will be rolled out in the next two months will allow physicians to exchange secure messages and patient information between electronic health records without having to be on the same platform. All local hospitals except the Cincinnati VA Medical Center use Epic software, but many local physician groups use a variety of other programs.



Members of the Independent Physicians Collaborative, whose specialties range from treating cancer to sports injuries, will be able to securely communicate with primary care doctors and hospital systems with the push of a button. By allowing the exchange of patient data, including physician notes, the more than 425 doctors who work for the 20 medical practices that belong to the Independent Physicians Collaborative will be on equal footing with hospital-based doctors.

"This is a big win for everyone," said Glen Prasser, CEO of Beacon Orthopaedics & Sports Medicine, which was one of the founding members of the Independent Physicians Collaborative. "This is a good example of independent groups working together with hospitals to provide better health care delivery to our shared patients."

DirectMessage was recommended to the Independent Physicians Collaborative and tested for the group by consultant Nick Recker, president of Path Forward, an IT solutions company based in Bond Hill.

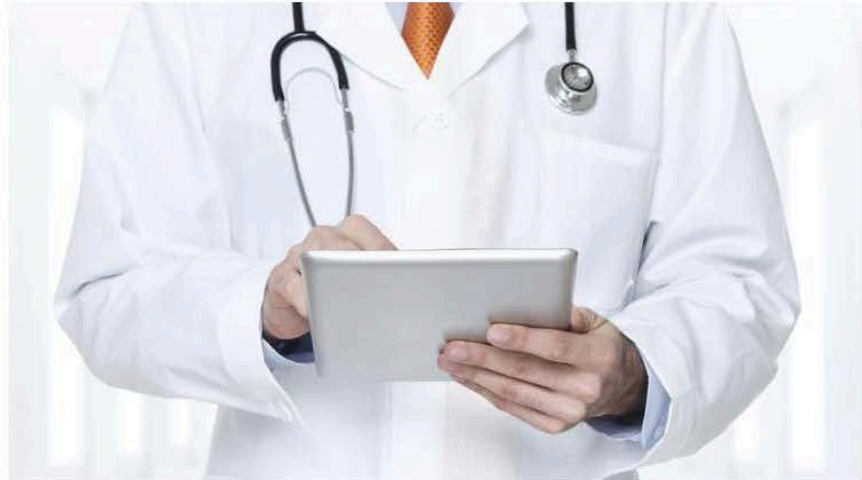
"It's sort of like email," Recker said. "You might have Gmail and I might have Outlook, but you can still exchange messages. And you have a standard for which you can exchange attachments."

"This allows that to go right in a patient's chart," Recker said. "What a lot of patients don't realize is how much communication happens that is never charted. The last thing you want as a patient is an obstacle between your coordinating physicians to communicate about your care."

The advance in communications is being supported by the Health Collaborative, which includes 31 hospitals and more than 100 long-term care, home health and other health care providers in Southwestern Ohio, Northern Kentucky and Southeastern Indiana. The nonprofit will share its regional directory of physicians with all participants. Patient records and test results are already shared through the Health Collaborative.

"This connectivity and physician directory sharing allows important clinical data to be shared when a patient is moving from one setting of care to another, which is a common gap we are closing," said Jason Buckner, senior vice president for informatics at the Health Collaborative. "This technology enables clinicians in the health care system to make more informed decisions that enhance patient care and lower health care costs for customers."

DirectMessage simplifies the exchange of communication, according to Buckner.



"We're able to turn this on in one day compared with months for complex interfaces," Buckner said. "By going to us, (a physician group can) connect from one source to all the local health systems rather than going to each on their own. It's much more efficient."

Members of the Independent Physicians Collaborative will have the option of using hbDirect, a secure messaging and email service offered by the Health Collaborative.

The hbDirect system is based on an open-source technology protocol created through the Direct Project. The emerging standard for communication is being fostered by the Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology, which is part of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Beacon Orthopaedics & Sports Medicine has begun using hbDirect, Buckner said.

The cost to set up was minimal, according to Prasser.

"A lot of this was available," Prasser said. "It was just a matter of coordinating it and getting everyone to agree to utilize this."

In addition to Beacon, the founding members of the Independent Physicians Collaborative were OHC Inc. based in Linwood, Cincinnati Eye Institute based in Blue Ash, Mayfield Brain & Spine clinic based in Norwood, the Urology Group based in Norwood, Seven Hills Women's Health Center based in Walnut Hills, Ohio Gastroenterology & Liver Institute based in Avondale and Tri-State Gastroenterology Associates based in Crestview Hills.

The collaborative **more than doubled in size** shortly after it was established last year. Other members now include Radiology Associates of Northern Kentucky in Crestview Hills, Professional Radiology Inc. of Blue Ash, Tri-State Centers for Sight Inc. in Crestview Hills, Riverhills Healthcare of Cincinnati, Commonwealth Orthopaedic Centers of Northern Kentucky, and Cincinnati GI of Norwood, Tristate Arthritis & Rheumatology of Crestview Hills, Reconstructive Orthopaedics & Sports Medicine of Cincinnati, Dayton Gastroenterology and Dayton Physicians Network.

The two newest members of the collaborative are Paradigm Pain & Spine Consultants in Florence and Cincinnati Breast Surgeons in Madisonville.

The five largest local doctor groups in the region are affiliated with hospital systems: UC Health's University of Cincinnati Physicians, TriHealth Physician Partners, St. Elizabeth Physicians, Mercy Health Physicians and Christ Hospital Physicians.