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Customer Insights

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with CareTech Solutions' products and services*

The Nebraska Medical Center

How CareTech Solutions' Rapid, Deep-Dive System Selection Methodology Helped The Nebraska Medical Center Quickly Choose an EHR that Satisfied the Enterprise

Selection Process Included Broad Range of End Users

September 2010 – Until recently, the system selection process in the healthcare industry mirrored the formal purchasing methods handed down by the public sector and military. It can be a long, blind-bidding transaction where vendors get little to go on, and system end users typically lack a vote in the ultimate purchase decision.

CareTech Solutions wanted to break that mold, and when approached by The Nebraska Medical Center (NMC) to review its existing Electronic Health Record (EHR) system and make recommendations for a new one, CareTech embraced the opportunity as one where it could facilitate a new spirit of speed, transparency and end user inclusion.

Climate for Change

The Nebraska Medical Center is a 624-bed acute care facility that serves as the teaching hospital for the University of Nebraska's health sciences programs. The medical center employs more than 4,900 employees and has over 1,000 physicians on staff. Since combining the operations of University Hospital, Bishop Clarkson Memorial Hospital, and their ambulatory care facilities to form one medical center in 1997, NMC is the largest healthcare facility in the state.

NMC has always had the goal to create a single, longitudinal patient record that was consistent across all healthcare facilities, from acute care to ambulatory. However, after a decade of waiting for better product integration, enhanced clinical functionality and improved delivery cycles by the existing EHR vendor, NMC's patience had worn thin.

At the end of 2009, the NMC Information Management Governance (IMG) committee approached CareTech Solutions asking the company to facilitate a review of its existing EHR solution and vendor, and if necessary, support NMC in the search for a new one.

CareTech was asked to participate for several reasons. First, the company had been providing healthcare IT expertise to NMC for years, specifically in the area of clinical help desk services, and had proven itself to be a trusted partner and objective third party. And second, CareTech was also uniquely positioned by virtue of its reputation as a

long-standing, industry-leading healthcare IT company that received the "Best in KLAS" designation for the last three years. These qualities, along with its extensive experience working alongside clinical application vendors in hospitals across the country made CareTech Solutions the natural choice.

In late January 2010, the enterprise-wide process, which included the collaboration of NMC, University of Nebraska Medical Center (UNMC), University of Nebraska Medical Center – Physicians (UNMC-P) and Private Practice Associates (PPA) was kicked off with a large-scale effort to interview and understand what physicians, nurses, clinicians, administration and IT considered to be the ideal EHR system. Working from this input, guiding principles were established. They were:

- The EHR had to integrate across the enterprise; all departments, from acute care to ambulatory
- The EHR had to provide standardized datasets that were expandable and allowed for comprehensive content and order management
- The EHR had to support reporting and regulatory requirements
- The EHR had to be flexible and interoperable with other systems
- The EHR had to be secure

¹CareTech Solutions is the recipient of the 2008, 2009 and 2010 Best in KLAS award for IT Outsourcing (Extensive) as ranked by healthcare executives and professionals in the Top 20 Best in KLAS Awards: Software & Professional Services report.

In addition to EHR functionality, the enterprise-wide team wanted a vendor to have a partnership philosophy that reflected the defined core principles.

Armed with these functional characteristics and core principles, CareTech considered the entire field of EHR software developers and winnowed down the list to five potential companies, including NMC's existing vendor.

However, taking five vendors through the selection process was unrealistic. The IMG needed to trim it down and asked CareTech to present them an overview on each company. Working from the guiding principles and first-hand knowledge of vendor metadata and system capabilities, CareTech provided enough information to the IMG so it could narrow the field to three. The existing vendor did not make the cut.

Time for a Reality Check

Implementing a new clinical application can involve millions of dollars, and can present a significant disruption to workflow. Before the process could continue, a governance check was necessary; including a presentation to NMC's Board of Directors.

In March 2010, the board approved the initiative, and the three vendors were invited

to the next round – a presentation to 174 hand-selected clinical, administrative, business and IT stakeholders from NMC, UNMC, UNMC-P and PPA. The vendors were given

the guiding principles and a very specific outline for their presentations to ensure fair, side-by-side product comparisons could be made. Score cards were issued asking various questions about the EHR, as well as the question, “Would the vendor’s technologies represent a quantum improvement if implemented properly?” While EHR preferences were evenly split among the three vendors, more than 90 percent wanted to continue the system selection process by conducting a deeper dive.

The benefit of this work cannot be overstated. When the day comes to implement a new enterprise-wide system, stakeholder participation and enthusiasm are vital to its success.

The Deep Dives

By April 2010, the IMG and CareTech narrowed the field of prospects to the top two leading vendors. It was time to prepare for the deep dives. Over the next four months, the team’s goal was to give as many stakeholders, again from NMC, UNMC, UNMC-P and PPA, the chance to get an honest appraisal of both EHR systems, while giving the vendors every opportunity to make their best case.

Over the four month period, creative assortments of educational venues were offered by each vendor to the 160 participants selected for this phase. The variety in format, including vendor fairs and webinars, and timing, provided many options for personally learning of strengths and weaknesses of each solution and vendor. During this same time period, CareTech also conducted extensive customer reference calls to confirm end user satisfaction with both the application and the vendor.

CareTech’s role in facilitating these events went well beyond scheduling. The company provided vendors with department-specific scripts to ensure the process produced a meaningful, side-by-side comparison for participants. Again, scorecards were used to quantify preferences and concerns. This time, the results were quite different. One vendor was breaking out as the clear favorite.

Beyond the Product

The third and final act of the system selection process focused on getting to know the vendors – personally. Teams of NMC employees were taken off-site to other hospitals

for a real-world look at client installations. They were also taken to each vendor’s headquarters. The goal was to move beyond the sales pitch to determining which vendor would be the right partner.

The visits to client installations gave everyone an appreciation of how the two EHR systems are running in similar environments. It was a clinical hands-on experience that answered most of the pressing concerns: Was the system easy to use? Were there quirks in the software? How responsive was the vendor to problems? Etc. The visits allowed NMC to go “off script” and solicit advice from healthcare colleagues who knew the products inside and out.

The visits to vendor headquarters were also helpful – walking through the doors, meeting developers in person, seeing the campuses – it brought a vital human element to the selection process. These people were the folks that NMC would be working with on a day-to-day basis.

The headquarter visits also revealed two very different corporate personalities. One vendor was publicly-traded with full financial transparency. The other not as large, and privately-held. One started with a laboratory application broadened by developing additional healthcare applications internally and through software acquisition. The other started with a database application that was expanded entirely through in-house development. One had extensive offshore development and support; the other requires employees to live within 45 minutes of its headquarters.

NMC came away from these the customer and headquarter visits with a clear preference for one of the two vendors. After months of diving deep into each solution and tallying up scorecards – the IMG committee saw in the data that one of the vendors had exactly what NMC needed to support its continuum of patient care.

The Final Vote

In September 2010, it was time to turn the decision back over to the people in an “all-hands-on” session.

To an audience of 126 stakeholders, which included clinical inpatient and outpatient physicians and non-physicians, business, administration and IT staff personnel from NMC, UNMC, UNMC-P and PPA; CareTech presented all of its findings. It reminded everyone of the new selection process used, sharing all of the quantitative and qualitative data collected along the way.

A final vote was held. Which vendor did the audience prefer? It was nearly unanimous. Out of 126 attendees, 118 preferred one vendor over the other.

The Lessons Learned

Through this new process of opening the system selection process to as many stakeholders as possible, NMC was able to achieve broad involvement and support,

as well as, near unanimity among physicians and employees in the selection of an EHR vendor. These levels of high engagement in the decision-making process will pay dividends as these individuals become ambassadors for implementation and adoption.

Older models of business are giving way to more transparency. Buyers want more information, not less. They want to go beyond controlled sales messaging and dive deeper into the products and companies themselves. They want greater involvement in a more democratic selection process. In this sense, a decision-making process that was an “all-hands-on” experience.

CareTech Solutions’ rapid, transparent system selection process just may serve as a new best practice in selecting any clinical system. The key parameters are:

- Utilize a trusted third party with an extensive healthcare IT experience to facilitate the review
- Determine the universally accepted guiding principles
- Go beyond the sales pitch and dedicate time for end-user learning
- Experience the vendor’s culture by meeting on their turf
- Conduct thorough customer reference interviews with like organizations

Lastly, put it to a vote and let the people decide. That way everyone is invested in the success.

About CareTech Solutions

CareTech Solutions, Inc., an information technology and Web products and services provider for more than 180 U.S. hospitals and health systems, creates value for clients through customized IT solutions that contribute to improving patient care while lowering healthcare costs. From implementing emerging technologies to supporting day-to-day IT operations, CareTech offers clients expert health information management services across the entire patient data lifecycle earning it the 2008, 2009 and 2010 Best in KLAS award for IT Outsourcing (Extensive) as ranked by healthcare executives and professionals in the Top 20 Best in KLAS Awards: Software & Professional Services report.

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