

Feature

Complete HealthCare Solutions and McKesson Bring Big IT to Small Physician Practices

By Abigail Jeffries

FAST FACTS

- The CHS-McKesson initiative serves over 7,000 providers and is about to roll out a major expansion.
- Small practices need only have Internet access to use a full line of interoperable, hospital-style practice management solutions.
- CHS provides local support for all the partnership's hardware and software solutions.
- Small practices can purchase national IT solutions at a reduced cost through CHS.

Hospital-caliber information technology (IT), complete with on-site support and service, is becoming available

to a growing number of small and mid-sized New England health care practices thanks to a partnership between Palmer, MA-based Complete HealthCare Solutions, Inc. (CHS) and health care services giant McKesson Corporation. McKesson, with headquarters in San Francisco and annual revenues in excess of \$93 billion, provides pharmaceuticals, medical supplies, information, and automation technologies.

CHS and McKesson will collaborate to offer their Healthcare Connected Initiative (HCI) product line nationwide. The HCI menu of IT solutions aims at connecting small health care practices with the rest of their professional community at an affordable price.

A Happy Marriage

CHS founder and current President and CEO, Michael Penna, is excited about the expansion of HCI. "The HCI program currently includes over 1,200 installations and over 7,000 providers," Penna said. CHS plans to add 100 new employ-



*Michael Penna
President and CEO at Complete
HealthCare Solutions, Inc.*

*David Henriksen
Senior Vice President/General Manager at
McKesson Corporation*

ees in the next 18 months based on the partnership with McKesson and the volume of opportunities it signifies.

David Henriksen, McKesson's Vice President and General Manager, said the partnership with CHS represents a desire for McKesson to be part of the "evolution that needs to happen" in small to medium-sized physician practices around the country. "McKesson has a complete suite of applications and connectivity services for physician offices. CHS can combine these in the right way to make them compelling for small practices in New England, and CHS can provide a local presence and expertise on the needs of small offices," he said.

The alliance has brought CHS McKesson's name recognition and significant resources for product enhancement. Penna said his company also now has access to a network of hospitals that use the McKesson system. "CHS can work with the small and mid-sized non-hospital physicians in these McKesson hospi-

tal spheres and help them connect to the hospitals."

Hospital-size Connectivity on a Small Practice Budget

Even the smallest practice can aspire to hospital-size connectivity. "We have a remote server here in Palmer. All a practice needs is an Internet connection to have access to our full line of products," Penna said. Products offered by CHS and powered by McKesson include: electronic medical records, practice management solutions, workflow management and documentation, revenue cycle (claims) management, off-site HIPAA-compliant data security service, prescription management, and online patient communication.

The remote service offers a meaningful cost-savings, according to Penna. "With the remote option, practices avoid hardware and software upgrades. CHS upgrades the software continuously, so the client pays only a maintenance fee

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Kirsten E. Wagner, MD
Child psychiatrist and owner of
ChildMind MD, LLC

plus claim volume,” Penna said.

Penna explained that annual hardware, software, and support costs average about \$9,000 a year for a small medical office, whereas the CHS remote option costs about \$3,000 a year. Up front costs for a single-user physician who wants to own all the hardware and software and have it installed on-site can cost approximately \$25,000–\$35,000, while CHS charges \$15,000–\$22,000 for a comparable setup.

CHS also touts the flexibility of its product line. “Most software vendors impose package deals on clients who may want only a piece of that package. Our portfolio solutions enable a new physician to start with the remote service, then add billing and records services as the practice grows,” Penna said.

IT Challenges Faced by the Small Practice

Apart from having modest budgets, Penna said small practices typically struggle to keep up with the constant flow of industry changes and do not have administrators, IT people, or consultants on call to scour the market for solutions that would best meet their needs. He said they often spin their wheels trying

to decide which solutions to buy. “CHS stops the madness. We run through an implementation model with the client, asking key questions that will tell us which solutions will work best, and we support all of them,” said Penna.

Kirsten E. Wagner, MD, child psychiatrist and owner of ChildMind MD, LLC, now faces these challenges as she prepares to launch her new single-provider practice in Lynnfield, MA. Wagner is in the process of shopping for affordable technology solutions that will meet her practice’s needs. “We are very interested in technology that will make the practice more personal, facilitate the ability to spend more time focusing on patients and their concerns and less time on administration, and any IT cost-savings we achieve can be passed along to our patients,” Wagner said. Wagner noted that telemedicine can improve access to high-demand specialists like herself and hopes in time to be able to use this technology to reach underserved areas.

Penna said single-provider practices often suffer with software vendors due to a lack of face-to-face support and the inability of their vendor to interface with other mainline software. “Billing, appointments, and scheduling must be able to connect to prescription management, collection, and document management,” he said.

Neil Feldman, DPM, owner of Central Massachusetts Podiatry, PC, in Worcester, MA, uses a comprehensive suite of CHS products and services in his two-physician practice. “This office has been paperless since 2004. Our practice does everything at the point of care now,” he said. “The medical note can be completed, the letter sent to the patient’s primary care physician, the prescription sent to the pharmacy—all before the patient is ready to leave.” The IT portfolio in Feldman’s practice enables him to log in from home to finish working on patient



Neil Feldman, DPM
owner of Central Massachusetts
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records. He plans to add credit card payment capabilities next. “The patient will swipe to make the co-payment, and this will automatically be applied to the patient’s account. It will mean one less administrative step,” Feldman said.

Feldman believes it makes good business sense for a practice to take the initiative when access to proven technology becomes available. “When a practice waits until it is forced to switch to something new, the adjustment often results in a step backward while the staff adapts,” he said. “But if new technology is embraced proactively, it makes life easier for everyone.” ■

Web References

- <http://www.completehealthcaresolutions.com>
- http://www.mckesson.com/en_us/McKesson.com
- <http://www.healthcareconnected.com>