

UI Health Decommissions Patient Accounting Systems and Saves More Than \$2 Million Per Year

Transitioning to a new EHR during a pandemic is like walking a tightrope. It's no wonder that when it came time to archive their legacy accounts receivable (A/R) data, and the deadline was short, UI Health put its trust in industry leader MediQuant. Not only did UI Health make its deadline, when it was time to "flip the switch," they did so with confidence, saving millions of dollars in the process. MediQuant had the experience with their legacy system to get the job done on time and on budget.

Profile: HIT With a Purpose

The University of Illinois Hospital & Health Sciences System (UI Health) provides comprehensive care, education, and research to the people of Illinois and beyond. A part of the University of Illinois Chicago (UIC), UI Health comprises seven UIC health sciences colleges, the 495-bed University of Illinois Hospital, a cancer center, 26 outpatient clinics and 13 federally qualified health centers.

UI Health is dedicated to the pursuit of health equity and this mission is ingrained in everything it does, including HIT. Recently, the organization joined an elite group of about 7% of U.S. hospitals and clinics that achieved the highest scoring (Stage 7) for their EMR capabilities by HIMSS EMRAM & OEMRAM (Electronic Medical Record Adoption Model and Outpatient Electronic Medical Record Adoption Model).

The Challenge: A Ticking Clock, Rising Costs

In September 2020, UI Health went live with an Epic EHR. The switch to Epic was important for an organization that needs tools like a patient portal to share information and keep track of appointments. "We are intent on doing all we can to serve the people of Illinois. Connecting and building solid relationships with patients is very important for UI Health, especially when it comes to our underserved populations," said Tom Perrone, UI Health Director, Business Intelligence.

What the organization could not anticipate, however, was that it would be transitioning to a new EHR in the midst of a pandemic. Then came another challenge. "We needed to shut down our legacy hospital billing systems because the costs of keeping them running were exorbitant," said Perrone.

According to Audrius Polikaitis, UI Health Chief Information Officer, "With a substantial portion of our patient population on Medicaid, payments take time, but we have a legal obligation to avoid write-offs – yet, revenue capture wasn't even our biggest problem."

"Two different billing systems and a separate billing company collapsed into Epic. Mainframe hosting, maintenance, and software support for these systems meant spending more than \$2 million a year," said Polikaitis, adding, "That's if the prices remained the same. The hosting vendor was already proposing a multiyear renewal with a much higher price tag."

Polikaitis and Perrone knew that they needed to move fast to save money. They searched for a vendor who could do the job quickly and had the right reputation, skills and experience. Most of all, they looked for a company they could trust.

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The Solution: A Trusted Data Steward

Per Polikaitis, “We were aware of MediQuant’s reputation as a revenue cycle archive leader, with the most projects and experience under its belt. In discussions with the company, we were even more excited to see that it had the knowledge, technologies, and mechanisms of a true data steward. This was an important deciding factor for us.”

“For example, MediQuant understands that where data originates is key to determining how to successfully extract and migrate it. And MediQuant speaks many computer programming languages, even COBOL. We quickly realized that we weren’t going to have to do a lot of the work ourselves, or worse, micro-manage them,” Polikaitis added.

But with such a short time between start and go-live, operational stakeholders were apprehensive. They asked, “How long will training take? How intuitive is this archiving system? How easy will it be to find information?”

“We had to assure our people,” said Perrone. “And it worked out. We hit the ground running.”

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The solution? MediQuant’s DataArk® platform, which Perrone calls an “archive-plus.” “DataArk meets all regulatory and legal obligations, and it’s operationally efficient while featuring an easy, intuitive user interface.” Perrone also liked that they were able to pick and choose their applications.

The Results: True Value, Real Savings

According to Perrone, “Data archiving is not the fanciest job, but done right, it is invaluable.”

Not only did the teams make their go-live deadline, but it was also a smooth process, from contracting to start to finish. The inevitable one or two start-up hiccups were easily resolved. Training took under a half hour and adoption came easy.

MediQuant consistently demonstrated competence throughout the duration of the project,” said Polikaitis. “At the start of the project, our people thought they’d have to do the data extraction themselves – they did not trust anyone. But when they started interacting with the MediQuant technology team, they found they’d met a company whose expertise they could trust. The entire project was handed over to MediQuant, freeing up our people for other important work.”

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“There was a certain level of comfort provided by the MediQuant team,” said Perrone. “They knew what they were talking about and there was no doubletalk. They had a well scripted plan with clear processes and milestones, and they walked us through it every step of the way.”

When they met the date to flip the switch, Perrone, Polikaitis, their technology teams and operational stakeholders had all played a role in validating the archived data via MediQuant’s proprietary process of checks and balances.

Besides peace of mind, both Perrone and Polikaitis agree that the greatest gift MediQuant provided is the tremendous savings. Instead of the \$2 million-plus per year to hold on to multiple old systems, they now pay a fraction of that cost for DataArk.

Advice for Others: The Secret Sauce

Perrone and Polikaitis believe that the devil is in the details, in this case data extraction and migration. “Don’t underestimate the importance of being extremely comfortable with how you move data from the legacy systems to the archive. For example, is your archiving partner making you feel secure that when the data moves it meets all legal and regulatory requirements?” warned Perrone.

Polikaitis calls data extraction and migration the secret sauce. “It’s nice to have an archiving platform with all the bells and whistles, but when it comes to moving data, there is no substitute for experience and methodology. MediQuant follows a well-versed script during extraction and mapping; they are not making it up as they go along.”

Asked if they’d do anything differently, Perrone and Polikaitis advise colleagues to start the archiving process as early as possible so that there is less pressure and more breathing room. “We were handed a situation – going live with a new EHR during a pandemic, and then having to consolidate our legacy systems. It took a while to drum up support for this part, understandably. But another month’s time would have been great,” Perrone said.

“Above all, we’re always happy when what we do helps patients. IT alone doesn’t provide healthcare, but it sure can make it easier. And if we can save money in the process, that’s even better,” Polikaitis concluded.

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