

Hattiesburg Clinic Improves the Patient Payment Experience and Streamlines Processes Through Sphere's TrustCommerce Platform Integrated with Epic



Background

Hattiesburg Clinic is a physician-owned multispecialty practice that employs approximately 400 physicians and mid-level providers across 85 locations in Southern Mississippi. Opened in 1963, Hattiesburg is now the state's largest multispecialty clinic, serving patients across 18 counties. Hattiesburg Clinic's mission as a group practice is to provide quality healthcare in an efficient and cost-effective manner, with emphasis on excellence and service to the patient.

Business Challenge

In 2013, Hattiesburg Clinic's leadership sought to modernize and upgrade its credit card payment processing capabilities to allow patients to pay bills online, while integrating payment functionality with its Epic electronic health records (EHR) system.

Hattiesburg had previously relied on time-consuming, tedious, manual processes to complete credit card transactions. For example, to process credit card transactions in-office, staff members had to swipe the card at a terminal, then enter those same payment details manually into the Epic system to generate a receipt for patients and post the transaction to the patient's account.

At the time, Hattiesburg evaluated payment technology vendors for two services: 1) payment gateway, which refers to the integrated software used to send credit card details securely to the payment network for processing and assist with payment compliance and 2) merchant services, the portion of the payment system that processes transactions and deposits funds into the client's bank accounts.

Solution

After a competitive review of vendors, Hattiesburg selected Sphere's TrustCommerce payments platform, in part due to its seamless and native integration with Epic. For the initial implementation, Sphere provided gateway services for patient-facing payments through Epic MyChart and at a kiosk location. This enabled the clinic to collect patient payments online and directly within Epic Welcome and to automatically post credit card payments to the patient's account in Epic after swiping cards at the kiosk.

As the business relationship evolved, Hattiesburg continued to expand services with Sphere. Hattiesburg Clinic's leadership recognized that patients wanted the ability to pay using a bank money transfer, so they added the Automated Clearing House (ACH) payment method and MyChart external payment page. By offering ACH, Hattiesburg increased MyChart adoption among patients.

As a result of the success of patient-facing payments, Hattiesburg added staff-facing payments via Epic Resolute. This enabled Hattiesburg to use Epic's integrated payment functionality at its clinics and business offices to reduce manual posting of transactions into the EHR system. Hattiesburg today processes patient-facing, front-office and back-office payments directly within Epic—all with a single payments vendor.

Additionally, Hattiesburg can establish recurring payment cycles within Epic for patients, an option that enables Hattiesburg to offer patients greater convenience, improve the likelihood of payment, streamline operations and enhance efficiencies.

Bringing patient payments full circle, Hattiesburg also chose Sphere for merchant services to eliminate reconciliation challenges experienced with their prior vendor. Hattiesburg's previous merchant services provider was a large, national company that was slow-to-respond and occasionally unresponsive to requests for support. This created challenges for Hattiesburg staff, particularly when they were attempting to bring payment processing functionality online for new clinic openings. Moving to Sphere, Hattiesburg reduced overall processing costs by bundling merchant services with its payments platform.



"All of the manual processing is gone," said Barbara Rhynehardt, Director Revenue Cycle, Hattiesburg Clinic. "Everything is seamless now, with a one-swipe approach. It changed everything for us."

One big advantage of transitioning to Sphere for merchant services was that it enabled Hattiesburg to use point-of-service devices that were integrated with Epic payment functionality. Access to the TC Vault web-based portal has also been a difference-maker for Hattiesburg's accounting department, which leverages the portal for detailed Epic transaction reporting, choosing from standard report templates or creating dynamic custom reports. With dynamic reporting, staff who have been granted appropriate permissions can create daily reports to reconcile Epic transactions that have been processed through the TrustCommerce payments platform. Reporting also supports multi-location, consolidated detail, providing Hattiesburg with the flexibility to generate financial snapshots of the entire organization or drill down into individual locations.



Results

Due to the reduction in labor-intensive, manual processes and the overhaul of its payment processes, Hattiesburg has streamlined operations while boosting efficiency and convenience for patients and staff. Sphere's payment processing solutions have enabled Hattiesburg to significantly increase its volume of credit card transactions: Hattiesburg has tripled its monthly credit card volume since implementing Sphere.

Further, almost 15% of Hattiesburg Clinic's patient payments are recurring, automatic payments, compared with none during the time when it was working its prior vendor. With these gains in efficiencies, Hattiesburg has reallocated three full-time positions in its accounting and collections departments.



It's just been a complete overhaul of all of our credit card processes, everything is more streamlined and it's become a lot easier and more convenient for patients.



- Barbara Rhynehardt, Director Revenue Cycle, Hattiesburg Clinic

Next Steps

Hattiesburg continues to grow and partner with Sphere as it adds locations.