

Southern Tier HealthLink RHIO Partners with AOI for Technical Project Management and Consulting to Accelerate Exchange of Clinical Data



Highlights

- Consolidated all IT vendors under a single project director
- Moved beyond legacy HL7 messages to exchanging clinical data such as CCDs in the HIE using IHE standards
- Kept single sign-on for physicians by enabling HIE data exchange into the physicians' EMR
- Implemented common viewer, enabling providers to view imaging from disparate PACS systems
- Formed consulting relationship to help RHIO prepare for new healthcare policies' effect on its existing technology platform
- Ensured successful completion of HEAL requirements for STHL

Background

Southern Tier HealthLink NY (STHL) is a non-profit Regional Health Information Organization (RHIO) designed as a partnership to bring together healthcare providers and patients in Central New York with technology that will improve healthcare quality, access and safety while reducing costs. Established in 2005, STHL's growth has been fueled by more than \$11 million in Health Care Efficiency and Affordability Law for New Yorkers (HEAL) grants with which STHL has created the foundation for the health information exchange (HIE) that currently serves a five-county region with about 470,000 residents, five hospitals and more than 800 physicians.

Challenge

With aggressive technology implementation and clinical objectives, STHL leaders knew they couldn't both steer the RHIO strategically and provide hands-on management of the numerous healthcare IT vendors who were implementing the technology that would be the underpinning of STHL's long-term success.

"The very core of our challenge was to identify a resource with strong healthcare IT experience, very specific technical project management skills and the ability to see the big picture of what STHL was trying to accomplish," said STHL Executive Director Christina Galanis. "We also wanted a partner with deep healthcare background so that they could help us navigate the dynamic world we live in today, including healthcare reform, meaningful use and even proposed policies that could ultimately affect the workflows of STHL and its stakeholders."

Other Valuable Initiatives AOI Managed for STHL

- Oversaw multi-RHIO exchange project to allow clinical information sharing between disparate RHIO communities
- Implemented electronic referral exchange functionality that leveraged the HIE infrastructure
- Oversaw patient-engagement project to facilitate patient access to HIE data via Microsoft HealthVault
- Leveraged an iPhone application developed by one of STHL's data sources, making HIE data readily available to emergency physicians
- Implemented successful testing of state-level exchange services via the Statewide Health Information Network for New York (SHIN-NY), ensuring STHL's compliance with required architectural standards and allowing STHL to be ready for future state-level services

Solution

In considering possible candidates for the project management role, STHL placed an emphasis on the new partner being familiar with its HIE platform from Healthvision (now Lawson Healthcare, an Infor Affiliate). Through its work on the HIE, leaders at STHL had become acquainted with Accent on Integration (AOI), which had been providing project management and Cloverleaf integration support to Healthvision. As Galanis, Healthvision and AOI worked together on the HIE, Galanis realized that AOI would be an excellent candidate for the STHL project management and technical director role.

“AOI demonstrated really strong project management practices and skills, which are necessary for a complex project like ours. Their detailed approach to project management not only matched my own, but it’s what was required to keep so many vendors on task, on time and on budget,” Galanis said. “AOI had a lot of experience with complex projects of their own and in support of vendors like Healthvision, and they have a very deep bench of experienced healthcare IT professionals who can do very thorough analysis of how changes in healthcare policies can affect our existing platform.”

The AOI team supporting STHL includes the company’s two co-founders who led AOI in providing project management, vendor management, contract management and technology oversight during the initial phase of STHL’s relationship with AOI. More recently, AOI began providing technology architecture consulting to STHL.

The relationship between STHL and AOI grew with the project as participating hospitals in the five-county region connected to the HIE. AOI shared STHL’s mission of enhancing the quality of patient care by making patient data available to stakeholders. After successful HIE connections with the hospitals, AOI and STHL took a much bigger step than many other RHIOs by going beyond simple HL7 messaging to exchanging continuity of care records (CCR) and continuity of care documents (CCD) across the RHIO. The exchange of CCDs was architected so that physicians do not have to sign in to a separate application to access the CCD.

“What we’ve seen transpire with STHL and AOI is really a maturing of our HIE and advances that we believe make us

very different,” Galanis said. “Unlike most other HIEs, clinicians don’t have to sign in and out of our HIE because patient data is pushed throughout our community, which has encouraged adoption. AOI oversaw the clinical document exchange between the HIE and EMRs as an automatic, behind-the-scenes function. We believe this is where meaningful use is headed, so we’re already ahead of that curve.”

Placing a premium on clinical workflow, STHL and AOI have created additional high-value functionality. For clinical imaging, AOI oversaw the technology project, which defined and implemented a community viewer that enables STHL hospitals to quickly and easily open and view radiology images from other providers despite having disparate PACS systems that couldn’t otherwise interface.

Through their clinical and technology partnership, STHL and AOI have broadened RHIO participation to include long-term care providers, home healthcare providers and county health departments. In addition, AOI oversaw a multi-RHIO exchange project so that disparate RHIO communities could share clinical data. AOI also helped STHL meet required architectural standards so that it was ready for future state-level exchange services.

Patient engagement was an important requirement outlined in one of the HEAL grants, and AOI managed this initiative, which facilitated patient access to HIE data via Microsoft® HealthVault™. AOI worked with several vendors to ensure a patient could push their CCR from the STHL RHIO into their HealthVault account.

“I can’t imagine many industries face a more dynamic future than healthcare, which is all the more reason why STHL sought to get its strategies, technologies and partnerships in place as early as possible,” Galanis said. “For STHL, it was very valuable to draw on AOI’s overall healthcare experience. In addition to supporting the successful completion of HEAL requirements, AOI helped us address some of the more forward-thinking ideas that people have put out there, and they examined how policy and technology changes would affect our workflow and the delivery of care so that we could plan accordingly and always keep pace with change for the benefit of our providers and their patients.”

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—Christina Galanis
STHL Executive Director

About Accent on Integration

Accent on Integration (AOI) enables data sharing by interconnecting healthcare organizations’ disparate technology systems and medical devices using its portfolio of vendor-agnostic software solutions, services and consulting. Hospitals and healthcare systems of all sizes, from stand-alone facilities and IDNs to rural and critical access hospitals, as well as HIEs and RHIOs, leverage AOI’s solutions to improve patient care by enhancing clinical workflows and eliminating data silos. AOI’s professional services also give customers technical support ranging from consulting and training to implementation. AOI’s team of seasoned healthcare professionals is dedicated to uniting people, processes and technology with the best, most cost-effective solution to meet each organization’s unique needs. For more information about AOI, please visit www.aoi.biz.