

Hitting their stride

Lower-extremity MSO leverages athenaOne to enhance financial and operational results, improve clinical workflows

At a glance:

- Largest lower-extremity care group in Texas
- 15 locations
- 60 providers

Challenges

- Disparate EHRs across multiple locations
- Staffing for rapid growth
- Performance measurement tools
- Lack of visibility into denial rates
- Reporting capabilities for quality programs like MIPS

Solutions

- athenaOne®
- athenaTelehealth™

Results

- Onboarded 10 practices in seven weeks
- Growth rate exceeding hire rate
- Easier to measure, monitor performance
- Near 100% improvement in days in Accounts Receivable
- Electronic remittance increased from 90% to 99%
- Improved clean claims rate
- Claims processed faster
- Enhanced quality program participation, performance

Texas may be known as the Lone Star State — but the leaders of StrideCare knew that autonomous platforms across their burgeoning group was hamstringing their success.

Comparing all of their disparate solutions against each other made deciding which one was the frontrunner easy, said Al Wilson, COO for the Texas-based podiatric group. “There was already a platform — athenaOne — that we could build upon, in terms of having volume on the system. The other systems were kind of downmarket,” he said. “They’re not something that you could use for a medical group like ours, that is planning on tremendous growth.”

Transitioning all practices onto one united system has given StrideCare invaluable access to data — along with the ability to analyze it — that helps them maximize financial and operational performance. They are also confident that they will continue to enhance their delivery of high-quality patient care, says Wilson.

Benefitting from a fast and steady onboarding process

StrideCare used a temporary reduction in patient volume during the earlier stages of the pandemic to transition 10 practices to athenaOne in less than two months. “We saw that period as one where people could spend more time onboarding with the system, because they weren’t as busy. So we just took advantage of that to make the conversion in just seven weeks,” said Wilson.

Just a few months after, they acquired and onboarded five more practices. StrideCare’s strategic growth plan includes adding at least 30 new providers a year, through which their EHR plays a key role. “The intuitiveness of athenaOne is a big differentiator,” said Wilson.

Senior Director of Operations John Jarvis added that athenahealth’s integrated practice management and clearinghouse system required a less heavy lift than other systems, which tend to be set up separately.

Another critical component of StrideCare’s smooth transition was a smooth data conversion process that gave doctors access to the information they needed, when they needed it, without any hiccups. Traditionally, conversions at organizations of their size and scope include “a big mess of PDFs to sort through, and try to find and sort stuff,” explained Wilson. “Having access to historical information in new systems can be so difficult. Having that seamless made a big difference for us.”

Operational and revenue cycle efficiencies support scalable growth

Beyond clinical efficiencies, StrideCare has realized several other efficiencies across the organization — including an electronic remittance rate increase from 90 to 99 percent, and a near 100 percent improvement in days in accounts receivable.

“Previously, we what we were working on before was a single clearinghouse receiver relationship. And we relied on a third party to split those ERAs. And that never worked correctly, so it added time and complexity, and cost,” explained Jarvis. “And then the switch to athena made it even easier to increase our electronic percentage and further cut down on manual labor related to paper remittance.”

The StrideCare team agrees that athenahealth has been the best choice for their managed services organization for another reason, too: a model that helps them grow to scale while adding fewer staff than they'd expect with another partner.

"The co-sourcing model has been fantastic for us" said Jarvis, citing the reduction in days in accounts receivable. "When new groups come onboard, we explain that athenahealth prepares the claim for you to make a decision. So athena does the work of finding the status, what needs to be done, and then presents you with options. There's no researching by us. There's no calling the payer. There's really articulate notes from athena. The model allows us to be leaner and more efficient with our staff."

Faster payments, with less frustration

Since onboarding with athenahealth, the group has also benefitted from the ability to identify missed financial opportunities. Previously, StrideCare couldn't analyze its denial rates easily "without a lot of digging" explained Jarvis. "When you look at it from the perspective of a group our size that's acquiring practices on different systems, the visibility to where our opportunities are is a big win for us. We're not only [gaining] efficiencies, but now we can see denials in a practice that before weren't visible," he said. "The ability to really understand where there are opportunities is something that's often overlooked. These smaller practices on simple systems, they may think that they're really efficient. But in the end, their yield is not at a benchmark rate. And that delta is opportunity — without having to do any more work."

Jarvis says he's gotten positive feedback from his practice managers, who report that their day-to-day is smoother because of the athenahealth partnership that allows StrideCare to write custom rules where their business needs are unique. Previously, several practices struggled with bills being sent to patients directly without review first. For some of the larger balances, there was a significant lag in getting paid, especially because many of those balances owed to the practices should have gone to payers initially. The impact is two-fold: StrideCare gets paid faster, and patients are less frustrated.

Supporting a high-quality patient and user experience now, and in the future

There have been other positive impacts to patient care with the transition.

Participating in quality programs is a strategic priority for StrideCare, making a transition to athenahealth crucial, said Wilson. The previous hodge-podge of systems made reporting for programs like MIPS (Merit-based Incentive Payment System) difficult – or impossible – for many affiliate practices. "Having that reporting and those capabilities is really going to drive us to be able to move to the next level," said Wilson.

Besides ambitious growth of 30 providers a year, one of StrideCare's other strategic goals is enhancing the patient portal adoption rate. Before onboarding, most practices either had no portal or used a third-party solution. Using a consumer-friendly option that's embedded within the EHR are optimal conditions to enhance adoption, said Jarvis. StrideCare sees an opportunity to easily address getting no-show patients getting rescheduled, for instance, with little-to-no-touch functionality.

"Something we ask ourselves a lot is, 'How do you prevent unnecessary work?' 'How do you work more efficiently and touch less?'" Jarvis said. "With athena, we see fewer clicks, fewer touches, fewer volleys back and forth on our work."

athenahealth's suite of financial, patient engagement, and clinical tools is getting StrideCare closer and closer to those goals every day, says Wilson. "We went quickly, and everyone can use the system easily. Now, we continue to realize our abilities to leverage the system and create even more efficiencies. We only see opportunities."



We didn't have an ability to baseline across all our systems before going on athena.. Now we can see how we can be more effective in claims reductions to prevent unnecessary work. Something we ask ourselves a lot is, 'How do you work more efficiently and touch less?' With athena, we see fewer clicks, fewer touches, fewer volleys back and forth on our work.

John Jarvis, senior director of operations, StrideCare

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