



Carolina Health Specialists®

Making the Connection Across Dozens of Providers

At a Glance

CLIENT

Strand Physician Specialists, P.A.,
DBA Carolina Health Specialists®,
SC and NC

ORGANIZATION

- ▶ 79 providers
- ▶ 94 staff members
- ▶ 9 specialties
- ▶ 9 locations
- ▶ Multiple hospital-based and primary care specialties, and multiple sub-specialties
- ▶ Average 18,000 patient visits per month

ISSUES

- ▶ Needing an EHR to stay current and achieve Meaningful Use
- ▶ Lacking a method to share clinical data across providers
- ▶ Dealing with self-pay problems from visiting tourists

SOLUTIONS

- ▶ athenaCollector®
- ▶ athenaClinicals®
- ▶ athenaCommunicator®

RESULTS

- ▶ 12.1% increase in collections*
- ▶ 100% of eligible providers receiving Meaningful Use incentive payments
- ▶ Improvements in self-pay collections
- ▶ Greater visibility to clinical information for all providers



Creating a Continuum of Care

Today's health care landscape is constantly affected by change. With new payer rules, government mandates and care coordination inefficiencies, it can be tough for providers to get control—and get paid for the care they deliver. These challenges can prove especially difficult for medical organizations that perform a wide variety of patient services.

Carolina Health Specialists recognized this and were looking for the right partner to help manage their patients' medical information. Offering services involving hospital-based specialties and family practice specialties (as well as numerous medical sub-specialties), Carolina Health has learned that many patients need both sides of their organization, and that extra focus was required to complete the circle of care for those seeing multiple providers.

“The goal, for the past two decades, has been to establish a continuum of care in this market, in which our hospital-based specialties become essentially the functional partner of the outpatient specialties,” explains Ken DeHart, MD, CEO of Carolina Health Specialists. “We felt that athenahealth could allow the greatest confluence and seamless communication.”



Responding to the Clinical Needs of a Large Organization

Before selecting athenahealth's cloud-based services for practice management, electronic health records and care coordination, the leadership at Carolina Health realized they needed a change to better manage data, but also to drive revenue.

“The pain point generally was the economic realities of modern health care,” explains DeHart. “We pride ourselves on being innovative and we felt it imperative to proactively step forward and adopt an EHR.”

“By having primary care and sub-specialties, we can have a patient possibly see two or three providers,” says Business Services Director Kari Vereen. “In the past, each provider had an individual chart, so there was not really a method of sharing patient information.”

The choice to partner with athenahealth came after a rigorous review process—after all, the decision would affect a host of managers and providers. Now with athenahealth's cloud-based EHR service, athenaClinicals®, all Carolina Health physicians access the same patient data with no gaps in information between visits. That's because athenahealth services are “in the cloud,” with just a single instance of clinical information that's always up-to-date and available. And since the network is web-based, providers can access it from just about anywhere.

“As specialties have become clinically segregated in expertise, their documentation requirements are also somewhat specialized,” explains DeHart. “We were very attracted to athenaClinicals' flexibility in accommodating for that.”





Achieving a Meaningful Use “Perfect Score”

athenaClinicals also brought Carolina Health success with Meaningful Use. With the technology, insight and support delivered by athenahealth, all 18 of the organization’s eligible physicians have attested and received Medicare incentive checks.

“We had so much support from athena, and the work athena provides for the Meaningful Use achievements, that with proper planning and confident monitoring, we did an excellent job meeting our goals,” says Vereen.

To guide practices toward achieving Meaningful Use, athenahealth builds clinical measures directly into the workflow, provides free performance coaching and even attests on behalf of the practice. Carolina Health had more than just a service—they had a partner.

“I talk to physicians that I know adopted an EMR, even earlier than we did, and ask how they’re doing with Meaningful Use,” explains CFO Debi Randolph. Their comments are ‘I’m not exactly sure where we are on that.’ I try not to rub it in to them too much!”



An Unexpected Financial Boost

With a 12.1%* increase in collections, Carolina Health has enjoyed other financial gains with athenahealth—and not always in areas they had expected. In the past, they had issues collecting payments from vacationers, who account for about 40% of their outpatient emergency care due to the practice’s unique coastal location. As Vereen explains, tourists often “leave town and don’t feel that obligation to pay a bill.”

That changed with the use of the online patient portal that’s part of athenahealth’s patient communications service, athenaCommunicator. The portal allowed patients to easily make payments via the web and enabled Carolina Health to send payment reminders.

“That was our biggest surprise,” adds DeHart about the self-pay boost. “The portal was a catalyst for payment that would have perhaps not occurred. Or, if it would have occurred, it would have been more costly to collect.”



Next Up: Coordinating Care Across the Community

Dr. DeHart is now anxiously awaiting the next step in Carolina Health’s relationship with athenahealth: Implementation of athenaCoordinator, a service designed to streamline care coordination across practices, hospitals and other health care partners.

“athenaCoordinator carries the philosophy that our group’s had for the last 20 years,” says DeHart, reflecting that all improvements in health care require cooperative work and thinking. “I think it certainly takes a collaborative effort. The challenges are great, the demands are many. But athena has been a very effective partner in addressing those realities.”

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Our clients see an average 12% increase in collections. This average is based on a weighted average for athenahealth clients with valid pre-athenahealth benchmark data that had their 15-month anniversary with athenahealth during 2010.



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At athenahealth, we know that every practice is different.

Contact us to find out how we can help you.

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