

CASE STUDY

Phoebe Putney Health System

Albany, GA

A Strategic Partner for a Growing Health System

More than a century ago, the founder of Phoebe Putney Health System was already looking to the future. When Judge Francis Flagg Putney decided to fund a community hospital in Southwest Georgia, one of his stipulations was that the building be made of brick, so that it would never succumb to fire—a pressing concern in Putney's day. From its earliest beginnings, Phoebe Putney has always aimed to use the most current technologies to help fulfill its mission of providing to care for all residents in the region, regardless of their circumstances.

As Phoebe Putney grew from a community hospital to a regional health system, it acquired smaller practices that formed the Phoebe Physician group, which now has 200 physicians and more than 100 advanced practice professionals. Each of those practices brought their own infrastructure – and their own information systems. After inheriting as many as nine or ten different information systems, Phoebe Putney leadership realized they needed to standardize these varied systems to operate more efficiently and effectively.

A Single Network to Drive Results

According to CEO Joel Wernick, the greatest challenge Phoebe Putney faces today is "providing our mission with diminishing resources." When his organization decided to partner with athenahealth, they were looking for a long-term, strategic partner that could help them unify their operations across the entire system and start realizing better results quickly.

"What athenahealth's been able to do is to help us organize ourselves in many ways with a fairly low-capital [solution] and to do it very promptly, and then ultimately back that up with training and education so that we actually use the tools as they've been designed."

Before partnering with athenahealth, Phoebe Putney lacked common practices for billing and collecting patient payment. Using the same best-practice workflows that are employed across the entire athenahealth network immediately put standards in place for the health system, which allowed the health system to send out bills faster and improve collection at the time of service. Robust training opportunities ensured all staff knew what they needed to do their jobs. Now, everyone is using the same system "efficiently to accomplish what it's intended to do," said Wernick.

Within their first year on the athenahealth network, Phoebe Putney began seeing improved financial performance. "We reduced our days in accounts receivable by 20 days in the first year, and that 20-day reduction assisted us in saving almost

At a Glance

- 4,500 employees across the network
- 200 physicians and 100+ advanced practice professionals in Phoebe Physician Group
- 110-year-old non-profit
- 500,000 residents served across 35 counties

Issues

- Challenged to fulfill mission with diminishing resources
- Declining reimbursements due to inefficient revenue cycle management
- Lacked standard procedures for collecting what is owed

Solutions

- athenaOne®
- athenahealth Population Health®

Results*

- Reduced no-show rate by over 3%, increasing revenue by \$2 million
- Reduced days in accounts receivable by 20 days, saving \$4 million
- Reduced denial rate by 1%, saving \$1 million

"As we grow and mature as a group practice, athenahealth's right there, side-by-side with us, helping us grow."

— Joel Wernick, CEO, Phoebe Putney Health System

\$4 million in accounts receivable." Phoebe Putney also reduced their denial rate by 1 percent in the first year, which earned them an additional \$1 million in revenue.

Let Staff Do What They Do Best

In addition to providing fast time to value, partnering with athenahealth has also allowed physicians to refocus their efforts on their mission. One of the reasons physicians join the Phoebe Physician Group is that they no longer have the capacity to successfully compete as a small business while keeping up with payers' changing regulations and requirements.

"They're looking to have somebody else take responsibility for a lot of the back office things so they can really focus on what they were trained to do and what they enjoy doing, and that's taking care of patients," said Wernick.

athenahealth takes on the low-value work that distracts providers and staff from their mission—including time-consuming tasks such as sending out appointment reminders – and performs it at scale on behalf of clients like Phoebe Putney. Using athenahealth's automated appointment reminders and more efficient scheduling processes, no-shows decreased by over 3 percent in the first year – which resulted in an additional \$2 million in revenue, with less work required of Phoebe Putney's staff to bring in patients.

With these tasks and others off their plate, "Our staff has a lot higher morale because they don't have to deal with a whole lot of things that they might normally have to," said Wernick. "It frees up our professionals to do exactly what they're trained to do."

Meanwhile, as they focus on providing higher-quality care to patients, Phoebe Putney can also benefit from athenahealth's expertise. "The benefit of the research and development that athenahealth provides to all of its customers ultimately allows us to access really progressive approaches to practice management" in an affordable way, said Wernick.

Growing Together as the Industry Evolves

Tapping into the knowledge of the entire athenahealth network has been one of the most valuable parts of working with athenahealth so far for Wernick. Before partnering with athenahealth, Phoebe Putney could only evaluate their clinical and financial performance by looking at data within their health system. "If all we do is benchmark against ourselves, that really doesn't help us," said Wernick. "What athenahealth does is help us really benchmark ourselves against a lot of other peers." Those peers include 85,000 providers across the United States on a network that is growing rapidly.

As a strategic partner, athenahealth also helps Phoebe Putney understand how to apply their performance data. "I've been very impressed by athena's research into trying to help all of their customers understand what the common benefit or opportunities may be," said Wernick.

For an evolving health system, the opportunities are great. Wernick is excited about athenahealth's vision for the future of healthcare: "There's constantly this energy of what's around the next corner." Whether evaluating current performance or looking ahead, Wernick views athenahealth as a strategic partner to Phoebe Putney. "As we grow and mature as a group practice, athenahealth's right there, side-by-side with us, helping us grow."



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