

## CASE STUDY

# HealthStar Physicians, P.C.

## Morristown, Tennessee

### "It Gets Better and Better:" Growth, Performance & Financial Health with athenaOne

With the shift away from fee-for-service reimbursement, HealthStar Physicians knew that growth was critical to their success, and they needed a cost-effective approach to collecting and reporting quality data. athenaOne's network-enabled EHR and practice management services helped the practice optimize their financial performance, add locations and providers, and successfully adapt to the changing reimbursement landscape.

#### Optimizing Financial Health

"With athenahealth, we have maximized our financial performance," says Don Lee, CEO of HealthStar Physicians. One factor in that success has been athenahealth's unique business model. Rather than a monthly or software fee, athenahealth charges a small percentage of collections. "We loved the idea of not purchasing software upfront," Mr. Lee says. "We did not have to invest large sums of capital in support systems."

Without significant upfront costs, HealthStar has financial flexibility to invest in its own growth—such as hiring more care managers and shifting their focus to value-added activities like patient engagement. "We are true partners with athenahealth," says Mr. Lee. "The more successful HealthStar is, the more successful athena is."

In addition, athenahealth's rapid implementation process helped the practice optimize efficiency and profit right out of the gate. "We were all amazed at the ease with which we made the transition [to athenahealth]," Mr. Lee says. "After going live, a vast majority of the physicians were back at full capacity within two or three business days."

"Our results in the realm of quality-based reimbursement are excellent," continues Mr. Lee. "We are now measuring quality payments in the millions. Our quarterly bonus checks keep increasing. Our Star scores continually improve and our RAF [Medicare Risk Adjustment Factor] scores are among the best in the region. This is all because of the tools that athena has given us."

With athenaCollector, the practice management component of athenaOne, the practice also enjoys a streamlined billing workflow, more effective collections, and faster payments. "athena has helped us to maintain an excellent days in receivable. We usually hover around 26," says Mr. Lee. "Since we started with athena, our initial claims rejection has dropped from the mid-teens to three or four percent."

Plus, visibility into financial performance helps Mr. Lee stay on top of the numbers. "athena's reporting capabilities allow me to run any report I can

#### At a Glance

- Large medical group with 16 specialties
- 47 physicians, 37 mid-level providers, and 475+ support staff
- 12 locations in 4 counties
- 21 years in business
- Serving 330,000 patients

#### Solutions

- athenaOne®
  - athenaCollector®
  - athenaCommunicator®
  - athenaClinicals®
  - athenaCoordinator®

#### Issues

- Inefficient billing and clinical workflows
- Challenged with transition to value-based care
- No visibility into performance across the practice
- Lack of scalable, low-cost health IT to support growth

#### Results\*

- Increased physician and administrative productivity with more time for patient care
- Days in accounts receivable reduced to 26
- Claims rejection dropped from mid-teens to 3%
- \$1M+ in bonus payments from quality programs
- Real-time visibility into clinical and financial performance
- Actively adding practice locations and providers

dream of, and address any issues," he says.

## The Transition to Value-Based Care

Mr. Lee remembers feeling reluctant about transitioning to value-based care. "As CEO of HealthStar, my biggest challenge was the change from volume-based to quality-based medicine," he says. "athenahealth gave us the tools and support to make this transition easier."

"We saw that quality care data collection was going to be important," says Dr. Peter Sutherland, a primary care physician at HealthStar. "But we recognized that hiring more staff wasn't going to be cost effective. We needed to collect data seamlessly and without added cost. athenahealth provided that for us."

athenahealth eases the administrative burden of value-based care requirements by managing and incorporating the latest quality measures into the EHR in real time. Doctors can focus on patients, the practice can meet quality measures efficiently, and patients get the best care possible.

As the industry shifts to value-based care, programs are growing more complex and reimbursement rules are changing. Practices can't afford an EHR that doesn't move with the times. athenahealth gives practices the ability to confidently stay ahead of industry change. For example, says Dr. Sutherland, "athenahealth is constantly working on the changes that come each year, like MIPS, so we don't have to worry about it. They do all the background work for us. They embed program requirements right into the product. We have easy access to data and metrics that we wouldn't otherwise have been able to maintain or monitor."

From an executive standpoint, Mr. Lee can track clinical performance in real time and make immediate adjustments. "With athena's reporting capabilities, my executive team can identify and respond to problems very fast," he says. "I can look at every provider at a glance to see where they are meeting their goals, closing their gaps, and reaching the appropriate Star numbers. We know where to apply additional resources so the organization can maximize financially."

## A Foundation for Growth

HealthStar is perfectly positioned for growth. With no big IT installation necessary, it's easy to onboard new locations rapidly and efficiently. All users are on the same

network, so practices see the same, continuously updated information at the same time—with no additional work for staff.

"Thanks to athenahealth, HealthStar is in a growth mode," says Mr. Lee. "This past year we added 17 providers. We moved from our local hub 40 miles away. Bringing on new offices was painless with athena's cloud-based platform. We're not limited to where we can open additional offices."

## "athena Makes Us More Efficient"

Productivity has measurably improved—as well as patient care. "athena has made our daily operations easier," says Mr. Lee. "Instead of seeing 20 or 22 patients in an eight-hour day, our physicians can see 27 or 28 and feel like they are spending more time with each patient."

"athena makes us more efficient," says Dr. Sutherland. "They take away a lot of the front office and the back office work. We don't have to worry about faxing, putting labs into the chart or building flow sheets. The athenahealth team does it all. That allows our physicians and staff to focus on patient care directly."

"With athena, I'm a better physician," says Dr. Sutherland. "The information I need is always at my fingertips without a lot of clicking. That allows me to make better decisions. I can get my patients engaged. And that's important in medicine."

Plus, Dr. Sutherland adds, "athena is a cloud-based solution so I can access it anywhere. I never have to remember what drugs a patient is on. Our network extends for 80 miles, and I have the chart available in any location."

## Forward Thinking

"athena is forward thinking," says Dr. Sutherland. "They are constantly trying to make their services better. I'm like that too. I always want to make my practice better. athenahealth allows me to provide better care to my patients and makes my job a lot more enjoyable."

Mr. Lee agrees that HealthStar is on a bright path. "Partnering with athena, we felt we were partnering with over 80,000 providers across the country. That is a lot of resources to call upon. And it keeps getting better and better."



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