

# Case Study

# A Community of Benefits

More than a decade ago, doctors and hospital staff in the Yakima Valley had to rely on paper files to track patients' medications and case histories. Retrieving this data both in emergency situations or for a simple prescription refill was time-consuming, costly and inefficient. At the same time, hospitals were simply unable to manage care in the ambulatory arena. All that began to change in 1999 with the addition of NetPracticeEHRweb™ by Noteworthy Medical Systems.

The easy-to-use web-based NetPracticeEHRweb offered Yakima Valley providers and hospitalists the ability to securely share patient information through Noteworthy's unique connected care solution, or **NetPracticeMedicalHub™**.

The MedicalHub, host to an electronic master patient index and community health record (CHR), enables secure electronic communication and data exchange between hospitals, national and regional labs, radiology, transcription services, practice management systems and other healthcare partners without breaking a medical community's budget.

Yakima Valley's providers securely exchange clinical data, refer patients, provide consults, and access the entirety of a patient's community medical history (labs, radiology, Rx and more)—all within the normal workflow of seeing patients. As a result, today **more than 85 percent of Yakima's 300 providers use NetPracticeEHRweb** to electronically share administrative and clinical information between care providers and multiple data providers in a way unseen elsewhere in the country. In fact, Yakima's adoption rate dwarfs the national average of only 16 percent.

## eliminate costs, reduce errors, save time

Noteworthy's Connected Care solution helps reduce costs, eliminate errors and simply saves time for everyone involved. Yakima Valley enjoys a turn-key health information exchange (HIE)—and much more because it promotes patient care in their community.

The automatic connection securely facilitates communication and sharing of detailed clinical data among all providers, offering sophisticated integration to and from hospitals, hospital networks, referring lab and radiology groups, pharmacies, health plans, and other healthcare data providers. The many benefits of sharing information electronically through NetPracticeMedicalHub include eliminating handling and scanning paper; reducing errors due to mismatched patient information; and speeding the delivery of critical information. Providers receive reports seconds after creation, even during nights and weekends. The system also automatically maintains a **HIPAA-compliant release of information record**, an aspect of the application users rave about.

## connected care

The success of the Connected Care network in Yakima is due to the area's critical mass of physicians who opted into the NetPracticeMedicalHub with the NetPracticeEHRweb application. Area data providers (hospitals, labs, etc.) were encouraged to interface to the NetPracticeMedicalHub with **NetPracticeRESULTS™**, which allows them to securely send data to almost all physicians needed. After interfacing to a substantial number of providers and labs, Yakima Valley Memorial Hospital (Memorial) and Yakima Regional Health Center also joined the network. This allowed both hospitals to exchange data through NetPracticeMedicalHub for delivery to NetPracticeEHRweb users in the Yakima Valley. With these additions, even more area physicians recognized the time savings and began using NetPracticeEHRweb in their offices.

Starting out by simply providing information to area physicians through NetPracticeRESULTS, soon the hospitals realized they could also *access* information. Hospital emergency room providers, hospitalists, pharmacists and nurses immediately adopted use of **NetPracticeVIEWER™** after discovering the benefits and value of immediate access to the wealth of this outpatient data. They now benefit from a vault of easily accessible chart information just like the physician clinics in the area.

"The information circle is now complete," according to Jim Aberle, chief operations officer for Memorial. "Memorial provides inpatient HL7 reports to NetPracticeEHRweb provider-offices and now Memorial has access to the outpatient reports. This is how medicine should work."

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—Jim Aberle  
Chief Operating Officer,  
Yakima Valley Memorial Hospital

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Aberle reports that by using the NetPracticeVIEWER “Permissions” system, Memorial users can quickly access outpatient charts, even from multiple-provider offices, saving valuable time. Besides the obvious hours-per-shift savings of tracking down patient history, problem lists, medications and allergies, the **instant access means faster treatment for critical patients** with less risk of treatment complications such as drug interactions.

## saving lives in an emergency

With NetPracticeMedicalHub, **hospitals now have crucial information that could save lives in emergency situations.** When a patient presents to most hospitals, the hospital-based patient record amounts to less than 10 or 20 percent of the patient’s total healthcare history—the balance is in various primary and specialty clinics throughout the community. This makes treating the patient difficult and potentially dangerous. Using NetPracticeVIEWER’s Permission system, however, hospital providers have instant access to these outpatient records and can safely begin emergency treatment knowing they have at their disposal everything they need—the most current labs, radiology, pathology, medications, allergies problems lists, vitals, chart notes, flow sheets and other clinical information.

“We used to spend 10 to 40 minutes per patient calling doctors and pharmacies for patient information, waiting for return-calls, taking handwritten notes or waiting for faxes,” says Alan Collinsworth, Emergency Department director for Memorial Hospital. **“Nights and weekends were especially frustrating and we often came up empty-handed. Now we just make a quick search via NetPracticeMedicalHub to get what we need in seconds.”**

## follow-up care & tracking

When a Yakima Valley hospital admits a patient nowadays, it’s a simple step for the patient’s primary care physician to then track their progress. When hospital staff use NetPracticeVIEWER to view a patient chart, the provider-of-record for the chart is instantly notified in their NetPracticeEHRweb message inbox of who accessed the chart and when. This allows the physician to schedule a follow-up appointment after the patient has been discharged from the hospital. Although statistics indicate that up to 85% of hospital patients do not get the follow-up care prescribed—mostly because no one called them to schedule it—in Yakima, they are solving this problem.

## one-to-many instead of one-to-one

Since most EHR vendors don’t include connections in the price of the software, one of the most notable obstructions to HIT adoption and usage is the high cost and slow development associated with setting up connections between healthcare provider EHR systems and information networks. In fact, EHR vendors typically charge or outsource connection services to other vendors. To construct a single connection, the industry average ranges from \$5,000 to \$25,000; this means for every physician practice that wants his or her EHR software to connect to a referring specialty physician EHR system, hospital, lab, etc., each connection would incur an individual cost to build and maintain. Needless to say, the cost of connection is just not viable for most.

As Yakima Valley providers know, NetPracticeMedicalHub drastically lowers the cost of connectivity because **one connection from a primary or specialty physician, hospital or lab is built once directly into the Hub.** Then the data is secured, normalized and distributed at the discretion of the information owners, automatically. In fact, the method of connecting one-to-many instead of one-to-one has been so cost-effective that Noteworthy has not even charged healthcare providers to set up a point of connection.

## the goal

The goal of the Yakima Valley medical community back in 1999 was the simple, smart and effective use of Noteworthy’s connected care network business design and expert medical hub technology. The result has been a community that effectively reduced the amount of time a physician and patient spend administering or waiting on the exceptional care all knew was possible—and now exists. ■