

How Penn Dental Medicine Achieved EHR Interoperability Between Dental and Medical Health Systems

A Case Study

Summary

Located in Philadelphia, Penn Dental Medicine is part of a greater Ivy League institution, The University of Pennsylvania, a robust healthcare system that includes a large medical institution. The school has been providing compassionate, comprehensive dental care since 1878. Penn Dental Medicine and the entire Penn Medicine complex is an intimate partner in the care of many of its patients. The university needs to be able to communicate, operate, and function effectively across a large patient community.

Penn Dental Medicine uses [axiUm](#) to manage electronic health records (EHR)s and student progress. On the other hand, the university's medical school uses Epic to track patients and medical students. Ultimately, Penn Dental Medicine's goal was to achieve (EHR) interoperability between dental and medical

without sacrificing the invaluable academic features in axiUm.

"Several years ago, we looked at an electronic medical record that included a small dental component," said Dr. Mark Wolff, Dean at Penn Dental Medicine. "However, we concluded that it was not worth the extra effort required to make the system work. We needed to come up with a solution that was going to save us time and would satisfy industry interoperability standards, with the least amount of time and resources for the faculty and students to access an integrated, interoperable EHR."



Penn
Dental Medicine
UNIVERSITY of PENNSYLVANIA

Challenges

Penn Dental Medicine has many patients who have shared care between the university's medical health system and the dental school. Often, health-compromised patients have complex medical histories and have many changes in their overall health history.

Sometimes, patients require two or three visits to the university for consults before being safely treated at Penn Dental Medicine. These consults are inefficient but necessary, as the dental school must receive the patient's holistic health story before treatment planning. Acquiring all the needed information is tedious and time-consuming.

It became apparent to Penn Dental Medicine that by pulling the necessary information from the medical EHR, instead of requesting consults and waiting for responses, they could save substantial amounts of time for their patients and provide answers immediately.

"Before EHR integration, we would request patient records from the physician resulting in various consults for the patient's current health and condition," said Dr. Wolff. "Now, with patient permission, we can access the most current health information on their record and put it into axiUm."

"axiUm provides our dental school with the ability to manage both our patient and student records effectively. Administering student grades, dental inventory, dental laboratories, and lab prescriptions all take place in axiUm. I was not interested in adopting a different EHR that might give me more medical data, but considerably less dental information."

*Dr. Mark Wolff,
Dean at Penn Dental Medicine*



Challenges

When integrating their medical and dental EHRs via Henry Schein's *Consistency of Care* solution (powered by Redox), Penn Dental Medicine's number one objective was to decrease the number of consults they were asking for. The goal was to give providers the flexibility to pull the information on their own.

The secondary objective for the EHR integration was to offer the ability to confirm patient addresses and reconcile patient health information to ensure consistent and appropriate record-keeping.

"Consistency of Care allows us to keep axiUm while maintaining interoperability between EHRs.

The use of axiUm is important to us because the ability to manage grades, individual student performances, and billings are daily requirements at Penn Dental Medicine. Larger EHRs do not manage grades or performances, and they have issues with billing for dental procedures. Keeping our current dental EHR and integrating with medical gives us additional flexibility in managing Penn Dental Medicine," remarked Dr. Wolff.

Most importantly, the first step was to negotiate which data to pull from the medical EHR — determining what dental providers consider "important information" expedited the software implementation process.



Consistency of Care

Results

As the new integration with medical and dental follows and supports the current academic dental workflow in axiUm, Penn Dental Medicine students can now access patient medical information more quickly, directly from axiUm. In other words, they can offer better patient care at an expedited rate. It has saved time by eliminating the process of sending a request, waiting for the doctor to receive it, and waiting for the response.

Interoperability with medical and dental records has also led to the improved overall quality of patient care. Patients are human. They forget that they take medication or may not understand why a medication they are taking would matter to a dentist. Having a patient's medication list allows Penn dental students to plan treatments more effectively at their fingertips.

Finally, connecting the medical and dental EHRs helps to increase the university's competitive advantage. "Being a dental school that is deemed interoperable enhances our competitive advantage because it says that we are on the forefront of healthcare and overall health," remarked Dr. Wolff. "That is really important."

"We believe EHR interoperability may enhance our competitive advantage as a dental school," commented Dr. David Hershkowitz, Division Chief and Associate Professor at the Department of Restorative Dentistry. "However, we believe every dental school in the country should be interoperable; this is the way healthcare is going. In a few years, the schools that aren't doing this will be at a disadvantage."

For More Information

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