

## Portfolios of Care

*Kathleen Ryan O'Connor*

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**With the cost, quality and complexity of healthcare under a national microscope these days, some hospitals are already realizing critical improvements by implementing project portfolio management, thanks to niche solutions designed specifically for their needs.**

Prior to 2006, barometers of patient care and hospital performance at the then-500-bed Abington Memorial Hospital in Abington, Pa., were tracked via a homegrown intranet application. Only one person maintained it, laughs Tony Simek, the hospital's director of quality data management, "Me."

"Anytime I did something, someone wanted more so we got caught in a cycle of maintaining it," Simek says, "It was one of about eight hats I was wearing at the time."

Today the growing hospital has more than 600 beds, 45,000 yearly admissions and 100,000 emergency room visits, and that homegrown intranet is now a fully scalable web-based project portfolio management software tool, developed for the health care market by Performance Logic, called HealthCommander.

Gone are the days of admissions and registration logging patients into two different databases or one person juggling a hospital's worth of data. Simek now has the ability to track some 2,000 performance metrics, including clinical indicators like patient safety, patient satisfaction, even diversity measurements among its 6,000 employees, and access is shared among a range of users.

Hospitals like Abington are part of a niche in the growing project-based software solutions market, expected by Forrester Research to encompass \$6.5 billion by 2010. As larger companies merge and go after increasingly bigger fish, companies like Performance Logic and TeamDynamix — which concentrates exclusively on the higher education world (see "[Pencils Down](#)") — are finding success in keeping their market tightly focused on one piece of the PPM pie.

Performance Logic's CEO Neelesh Shah's background as a health care management consultant and knowledge of how hospitals worked proved invaluable when Performance Logic went live with HealthCommander after alpha and beta versions in 2002.

Speaking the customer's language is key. Atop a "fully robust" PPM base, HealthCommander has a healthcare-specific scorecard base and a platform that allows users to build out as they see fit, from infection rates to patient satisfaction, anything that can be used for improvements or tracking projects, Shah says, describing his customer base as about 80 percent hospitals and about 20 percent IT/consulting/supply companies.

The needs of the healthcare customer are different in other ways, too. Unlike other industries, patient privacy laws mean hospitals "are very wary of their data leaving their walls," Shah says. And healthcare's unique role in society means even small improvements in performance or efficiency can have huge returns — saved lives, more money for ground-breaking research, less waste.

If you are doing a performance improvement plan, you don't typically have nine months to do, say, one protocol

for chest pain complete with a three-month, full-risk assessment, Shah says. Following guidelines in a hospital setting won't seem all that recognizable to a typical IT project manager.

"Project management tends to be very intimidating to non-project managers and our platform does allow different" approaches. "PDCA — plan, do, check, act — that can be loaded in at the same time IT is doing PMBOK or Agile," he says.

Performance Logic uses its small size — 15 people, headquartered in Portland — as an asset against larger players, Shah says. "We've built our products specifically for the health care industry and that gets us to the table when we are competing for things."

Margo Visitacion, vice president research at Forrester, says she has seen a consistent demand for PPM solutions inside IT because there is a strong need to manage resources a lot more effectively, but a bit of a different world outside. "Outside of IT, I see more demand in the services area for professional services automation (PSA) because the projects tend to be small. But allocating resources is again the driver — especially when contractors are involved," she says.

That said, as the larger "best-of-breed" players like Primavera have been acquired, there are a number of small "boutique" vendors that have popped up to serve industry-specific needs. Most of these vendors have started out building tools as part of a services delivery engagement, or to fill a particular market need, Visitacion says.

"If you look at these tools, there is more marketing segmentation versus functionality segmentation — the mechanics of PPM aren't that different, but the references are — and for smaller vendors, that's key," she says.

Hospitals are paying attention. The Hospital for Sick Children, Canada's most research-intensive hospital, earlier this year announced it had implemented HealthCommander across its enterprise, meaning more than 300 active IT projects per year and a user base that will potentially include more than 3,000 clinical and business professionals. Other users of HealthCommander include the Children's Medical Center of Dallas and Owens & Minor, a Virginia-based medical products supplier.

For Simek, the ability to translate solid project management techniques throughout a healthcare organization is invaluable.

"We were finding that metrics were captured in all the four corners of the world, so to speak" before adopting HealthCommander, Simek says. "One department would be going out of their way to track admissions, when registration was tracking it somewhere else. Now everyone accesses everything at the same place."

The portfolio management aspects of the tool were quickly adopted by IT but other areas are now integrating those functions. "It does require some training, but that depends on how complicated you want to make it," Simek says.

"With our SQL server database our goal the first year was to get six departments online in 12 months," he says. With HealthCommander, "we got 60 departments up and running in 90 days."

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