Specialized ASC Software Helps Center Improve Efficiency, Increase Revenue

Emerald Coast Surgery Center is a busy, multi-specialty ambulatory surgery center based in Fort Walton Beach, Florida. The Center, which was founded nearly 25 years ago, handles about 6,500 cases per year. Prior to partnering with HSTpathways, the Center was struggling with a legacy administrative software system that didn’t support the Center’s needs for operational efficiency and accessible data. The Center was also using a cumbersome and inefficient paper-based system for patient records. Since implementing HSTpathways (ASC administrative/business software) and HSTeChart (ASC EHR software), the Center has been able to improve operational efficiencies and to implement ongoing, data-based analysis of operations and income, leading to decreased costs and increased revenue.
Anne Kachelhoffer is well-versed on the topic of performance benchmarks for ambulatory surgery centers (ASCs). Kachelhoffer, administrator at Emerald Coast Surgery Center, not only knows the industry benchmarks, she also knows exactly where her Center stands in relation to them. “Patient satisfaction, revenue cycle management, operational efficiency—you name it,” she said. “We consistently perform in the highest percentile in ASC benchmark categories.”

Kachelhoffer attributes Emerald Coast Surgery Center’s high performance to two important factors. First, the Center boasts “a dynamite team” of physicians and staff who “work well together in pursuit of patient satisfaction and quality of care.” A close second in the Center’s success is their partnership with HSTpathways (HST), a provider of specialized ASC software.

Emerald Coast Surgery Center uses two of HST’s integrated software solutions: HSTpathways to manage the Center’s business operations, and HSTeChart to manage clinical information. “We simply could not perform as efficiently and successfully as we do without the support of HST as our technology partner,” Kachelhoffer said.

Choosing an ASC Administrative Software Solution: HSTPathways

When Kachelhoffer joined Emerald Coast Surgery Center three years ago, the Center was looking to replace the ‘archaic’ software solution they were using to manage business operations. “Having worked in the industry for more than 16 years, I knew there were better solutions out there,” she said.

The Center’s priorities included finding software that aligned with ASC workflows, was easy to deploy and intuitive to use. “After reviewing the possibilities, we decided on HSTPathways pretty quickly,” Kachelhoffer said. HSTPathways’ ASC software is designed specifically for ASC workflows. The solution supports surgical scheduling, inventory management, clinical workflows, medical coding, insurance and patient billing, accounts receivable collections and robust reporting capabilities.

HSTPathways’ detailed and flexible reporting functionality was of particular interest to Kachelhoffer. “One of our main objectives in replacing our old software was that it wasn’t providing us with the data we needed to track and evaluate our operational efficiency and to meet regulatory reporting requirements,” she said. “We wanted to be able to track our data more efficiently so we could improve our business performance,” she said.

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Administrator, Emerald Coast Surgery Center
Easy Deployment, Intuitive Interface

HSTpathways can be delivered on-premise (installed on the client organization’s servers) or delivered over the internet (Software-as-a-Service). Emerald Coast Surgery Center chose the on-premise route, which requires more technical administration from the Center but was consistent with the Center’s governance requirements. Eight weeks after the contract was signed, HSTpathways was live.

“HST provides a really good staff training program,” said Kachelhoffer. “We used a combination of webinars, online training and on-site training for our team.” Staff were trained in basic tasks first, such as tracking times as patients moved between areas (pre-op, surgery, post-op) and logging Medicare G-codes. “Super users” on the Center’s team were trained in more complex tasks, such as creating case profiles, developing and using preference cards, and materials management. The Center’s “super users” then shared their expertise with the rest of the staff.

“We had nurses who were not accustomed to using computers in the clinical environment, but they caught on quickly, because the program is so easy to use,” said Kachelhoffer. “One of the unexpected benefits of using HSTpathways is that everybody’s basic IT skill sets have improved. Learning to work with the software has increased the team’s self-confidence and even helped them to think differently about problem-solving.”

Adding the Medical Record: HSTeChart

When the Center first implemented HSTpathways, HSTeChart was not yet available. “We knew HST had plans to develop an ASC-specific electronic health record (EHR), and we were so pleased with HSTpathways, we knew their EHR would be worth waiting for,” said Kachelhoffer. The Center implemented HSTeChart this past spring, and “it was definitely worth the wait,” she said.

“Prior to the release of HSTeChart, we were using paper charts to track clinical information. It was a very expensive, labor-intensive and inefficient way to do charting,” she said. “We had paper chart packs for each of the different surgeries and procedures. We had to print out each of the forms, match them up with other documentation like the scheduling order, history and physical, lab notes—it was a very cumbersome process. We were spending about 10 hours per week on chart prep and about 24 hours per week on chart audits, prior to close.

“Now everything is electronic. The orders, patient demographics, clinical documentation, pathology reports—all of the information we need is in the same database. Since the information is digital, it is always accessible to whoever needs to see it. Staff can even access the same patient record at the same time, because HSTeChart’s LiveEdit™ technology alerts users to real-time changes in patient information,” Kachelhoffer said.

“Our Center is 25 years old, so we have a lot of records in storage. We were spending several thousand dollars each month on storage costs and retrieval costs for all of those patient charts. We decided that the money we were spending on keeping paper records in storage could be better used to help push us forward into what healthcare is going to demand of us tomorrow. Since we implemented HSTeChart, we have stopped generating paper records, and we are working on digitizing the backlog of archived records we have.”

Digitizing the Center’s clinical records has not only improved clinical workflows and eliminated storage costs; it has also enhanced revenue cycle management by improving the chart completion process. “We are doing upwards of 550 cases each month. You can imagine how challenging it was to track chart completion when we were working with paper records. With HSTeChart, I can log in and see how many charts are incomplete and what elements are missing. Is it an unsigned physician’s order? An unsigned operative report? It makes it much easier to identify which charts are incomplete, why they
Case study | Emerald Coast Surgery Center

About HSTpathways

HSTpathways is the leading provider of cloud-based surgery center management software. HSTpathways’ application suite supports surgical scheduling, inventory management, EHR clinical workflows, medical coding, insurance and patient billing, and accounts receivable collections for freestanding ambulatory surgery centers, multi-facility corporate enterprises, and ASC-hospital joint ventures. HSTpathways applications help surgery centers maximize case profitability, achieve faster reimbursement, and lower AR days. For more information, visit: www.hstpathways.com

are incomplete and what we need to do to close them.”

Kachelhoffer is so enthusiastic about HSTeChart’s ability to facilitate chart completion, that she has established a new benchmark for her team. “The industry standard is to have a medical record closed within 30 days,” Kachelhoffer said. “But HSTeChart makes the process so efficient, we are now aiming to have 90 percent of our charts closed within 14 days. HSTeChart has helped us up the ante.”

Data Supports Increased Efficiency and Increased Revenue

HSTpathways’ ability to track and report on all aspects of business processes has been invaluable in supporting the Center’s focus on continuous improvement. “I cannot emphasize enough how valuable data is in healthcare right now. It’s not any less valuable to us, in our small Center, than it is to the large hospital across the street,” said Kachelhoffer.

Increasing efficiency in chart completion is just one of many operational efficiencies the Center has been able to implement now that detailed data is available. “It’s not just about being able to collect the data, but also being able to access that data and to drill down into it to look at specifics,” said Kachelhoffer.

“We are able to use the data in HSTpathways to analyze all of our workflows, everything from our scheduling process, to our forms, to our pre-admit and pre-op processes, to our billing and accounts receivable processes. We are constantly analyzing our business operations. How can we do this better? How can we do this smarter?” Kachelhoffer said.

“One of the things we were able to do after we implemented HSTpathways was to really look at our cost per case, our partnerships with our insurance companies, and our contractual revenue variance. We ended up reclassifying some of our contracting, because as healthcare is changing, payer profiles change as well,” she said.

“The ability to perform net revenue analysis has been really helpful. We were able to dissect out the multiple payer distribution and to evaluate our primary versus our secondary markets. We were able to use the data in HSTpathways to see where the cost of a procedure had outrun the market profile for our Center. As a result of that information, we were able to justify increasing our market rate.”

A Long-Term Partnership

Emerald Coast Surgery Center’s return-on-investment from their partnership with HST has exceeded expectations, said Kachelhoffer. “HST has helped us improve the use of all of our IT resources,” she said. Center staff continue to optimize their use of HSTpathways and HSTeChart tools and resources through ongoing trainings available through HST’s active user training site.

“I’ve really seen my team grow since we started using HSTpathways and HSTeChart,” Kachelhoffer said. “They have always been an excellent team, but since we implemented the new software, they have grown even more. It’s important to feel good about going to work every day and to be happy doing what you do for a living. We try to give our team the tools they need to be successful, and HST is a major part of our ability to do that. I’m excited about the future we have with HST.”

For additional information, please contact us at
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