

## Providing Superior User Experiences in Hosted Environments

Healthcare organizations that are hesitant to invest in major implementations due to expense or risk to the organization often look to either vendor or private hosting methods in order to limit expenditures. However, a considerable number of healthcare facilities have found support and success integrating these solutions through health systems as hosts. One example is Epic's Community Connect model, which allows a health system to act as hosting services for smaller facilities and organizations.



Mercy Technology Services acts as the technology backbone of Mercy Health System, a 45-hospital Catholic health system. Mercy developed a unique position to offer first-hand Epic experience and personalized service to other healthcare organizations in a client-based hosting environment. Mercy Technology Services now goes beyond providing Mercy with IT support to give analytics, consulting, and Epic hosting to clients across over seven states.

Peggy Burrows, Vice President of Revenue Cycle, Scott Richert, Vice President of Enterprise Infrastructure and Operations, and Mark Brinley, Vice President of Integration Management spoke with The Academy regarding the hosting experiences of Mercy Technology Services.

The organization began as a consolidated shared services organization dedicated to serving Mercy's enterprise wide businesses and thereby provide a single electronic health record (EHR). "[The EHR implementation] was a big change for us. It was a point in time where the organization really saw that the technology strategy was key to the business in clinical strategy and that they were really the same thing," Richert explains.

Consolidating IT services within a single organization, followed by the early implementation of the EHR, solidified the branch as key a partner of Mercy Health System. In order to drive infrastructure improvements, Mercy Technology Services built out a world-class service desk, constructed a new data center, established customer service strategies, and determined hosting methods for Mercy internally. After finalizing these strategies within the organization, the organization turned the successful model outward to aid external healthcare clients.

## Implementing Hosted Solutions within Client Environments

Any function of the Epic platform that Mercy Health System currently offers the organization can be easily hosted out to commercial clients. As an enterprise client of Epic, Mercy supports nearly every module the EHR has to offer apart from two or three newly added applications, which the health system plans to deploy later in the fiscal year.

A team geared specifically toward implementations into hosted organizations works within the facilities, beginning with a pre-installation site assessment. In the early days of the decision-making process, members of the team visit each department at the client hospital to analyze individual infrastructure needs as well as introduce members of the facility to the team. Additionally, these introductions allow Mercy Technology Services' team to set expectations for time commitments, identify data that will be required from the client, set documentation requirements, and ensure that Mercy's version of Epic to be hosted within the facility will be a proper fit.

"Some of our implementations we've already seen some variants unique to the clients that we support, and we try to accommodate those as much as we can," Brinley says.

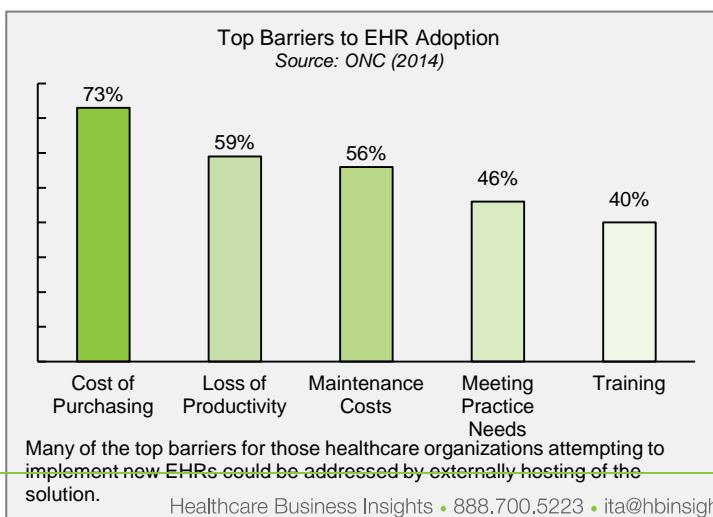
"Our team is experienced. We're not just thinking about the build and how the build is going to happen, but also the workflow behind it that has to be supported," Burrows adds.

The typical go-live process after the pre-implementation assessment visits for a hospital setting lasts 12 to 15 months. Implementations lasting a full 15 months usually account for the hospital setting requesting extra time. Mercy Technology Services traditionally has seen most facilities go live by the end of 12 months. Clinic settings vary between 6 to 12 months depending on the number of providers within the network that must be brought into the system.

## Hosting as a Health System

Development of hosting capabilities began as Mercy Technology Services built a data center and implemented the Epic EHR from scratch. With the encouragement of executive leadership and past partnership successes, Mercy Technology Services saw a space for healthcare providers holding accountability as hosting providers. Many healthcare organizations find a world-class health record necessary, but face a daunting reality of high expense and risk in order to implement.

"A lot of times we deal with mid-size and small market hospitals, where those risks and costs are really daunting, and they realize they need help and can't do it by themselves. Looking at hosting providers, there's risk there as well because if you just go to the cloud hosting provider or someone who doesn't specialize in EHRs you lose that single of accountability," Richert explains.



Mercy Technology Services recognized that these organizations required partners with similar risks and responsibilities. By replicating the successes the organization had deploying the EHR in its 35 hospitals, those clients could follow implementation similar path and learn from the organization's experiences.

Along with the help of security experts, the organization then focused on creating a data center that would allow multiple tenants with isolation and sharing, when necessary, between customers. A model was created from this foundation, offering clients the opportunity to implement a standard approach with some flexibility depending on the needs of the facility.

"We're able to figure out unique solutions for people because we have very experienced application build coordinators that know the system well enough that they can handle some of those unique factors. We get good results in that system build for their operations," Burrows explains.

Facilities utilizing Mercy as a hosting service are able to incorporate organization logos into certain user interfaces, such as the patient portal and on documentation forms. However, at its base interface, the EHR operates under the same under the hood. This model allows client organizations to support individual branding as needed.

### Challenges and Benefits of Supporting Health System Hosted Applications

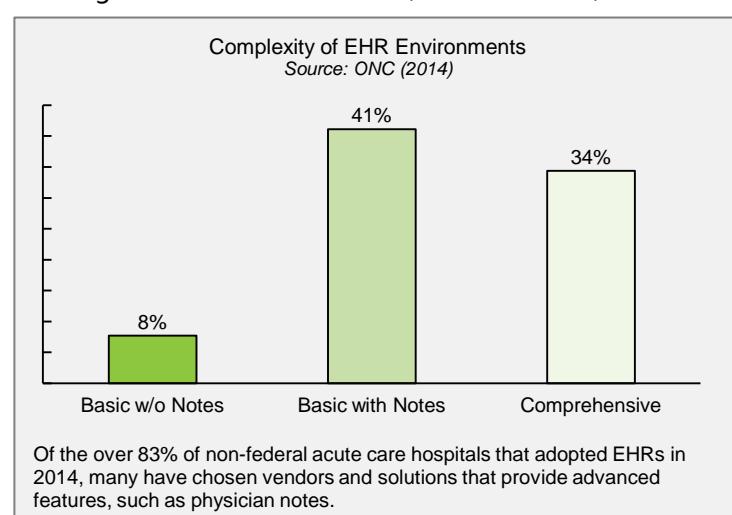
The temptation to recreate exact environments for client facilities can often overshadow important new implementations. For Mercy Technology Services' implementation team, working with organizations to avoid this temptation and trust the functionalities of the newer EHR can be a significant challenge.

"In some cases trying to gain consensus within the organization for direction can be a challenge. They look to us to help them make the right decisions about their operations in many cases. It can be a bit challenging in some cases to really stick to the Epic build and workflow," Burrows says.

Another challenge concerns the connections to the client facility's network and security settings. Finding the best way to tie into the partner's network can often be straightforward; however, interfaces such as printing, IP addresses, and other smaller security settings can often cause complications during interface planning. Challenges such as these can be caught during the pre-implementation assessments, but are often afterthoughts for client facilities.

However, just as affiliates benefit from Mercy Technology Services, so too does the organization learn from its client sites. Clients frequently teach the organization new workflows, functionalities, and versions of applications that Mercy may not yet support. Likewise, Mercy Technology Services can then delve deeper into researching those aspects of the solutions for future implementations.

Clients of course reap the benefits of lower risk and expense than typical EHR deployments. Depending on an organization's size, the implementation of an EHR or similar large-scale



application could be an investment of upwards of millions of dollars in capital. Taking advantage of a hosting situation and sharing infrastructural requirements brings stability to such providers. The affiliated facility then gains access to several templates, models of implementation, and project management practices that can help it avoid costly mistakes.

## Qualifying the Value of Health System Hosting

Much of the reluctance to utilize externally hosted and private cloud solutions stems from the lack of understanding between vendors and clinical staff. A health system-hosted model provides the opportunity for healthcare IT leaders to receive support directly from members who speak the same language as them. Along with this understanding comes the confidence that the health system is protecting its own data as well

"I think healthcare organizations are finding it appealing that they can get HIPAA- and HITECH-class security and a partner network like ours rather than going to a nameless and faceless cloud or hosting provider. I think this is an interesting model for folks to look at for a way to take risk out and feel more comfortable," Richert explains.

Beyond the ability to host the full Epic platform, Mercy Technology Services has also started providing capabilities to advance implementations through thought leadership and expertise. Implementation services can even assist clients in advancing stages of implementation to take less time for the affiliate.

Strategically employing hosting from another healthcare organization may not only reduce the costs and risk for the affiliated organization, but may also strengthen the overall process of implementation. Mercy Technology Services demonstrates the capabilities of these hosting agreements as a means of supporting cultural experience within the health IT setting during implementations and post go-live stages.