



# Ultra Care Endocrine & Diabetes Consultants

## Following a Smooth Road to Meaningful Use

### At a Glance:

#### CLIENT

Ultra Care Endocrine & Diabetes Consultants  
Venice, Florida

#### ORGANIZATION

- ▶ Solo endocrinology specialist
- ▶ One billing manager, one nurse, one receptionist, contracted dietician
- ▶ Sees an average 320 patients per month

#### GOALS

- ▶ Secure Meaningful Use incentives
- ▶ Improve patient care
- ▶ Be a leader in her specialty
- ▶ Improve practice cash flow

#### SOLUTIONS

- ▶ athenaCollector®
- ▶ athenaClinicals®
- ▶ athenaCommunicator®

#### RESULTS

- ▶ Achieving Meaningful Use measures
- ▶ Fewer clinical staff needed to pull charts, place orders/prescriptions
- ▶ Web portal boosts patient ease and satisfaction
- ▶ Knowledge that patient care is improving over time



### Meaningful Use Doesn't Have to Be Hard

By the beginning of 2011, a year into a five-year endeavor, some 18,000 eligible providers had registered to achieve Meaningful Use of an electronic health record (EHR). As the head of the Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology put it, the nation's health care community is entering an "age of meaningful use." But at this point in the journey, many eligible providers are finding that the road to Meaningful Use is bumpier than anticipated.

Meaningful Use, or MU as we'll abbreviate it here, represents specific criteria that individual eligible providers must fulfill in their use of certified EHRs to receive up to \$44,000 from Medicare over five years. From 2011 to 2012, the process is in Stage 1, when eligible providers must capture specified patient information like vital signs and demographics. To meet Stage 1 criteria and receive up to \$18,000 in the first year, providers must attest to demonstration of 15 core and 5 of 10 menu criteria using a certified EHR.

However, many practices are learning – and sharing with an ONC committee – that their vendors will be charging fees for upgrades, consulting services, new modules, and other unforeseen up-charges. Some are looking at the added expenses and wondering if the stimulus payments will be enough to recoup their investments. And because they use software and not a service, the requirements are already proving unwieldy and burdensome. A recent athenahealth survey of 500 physicians in the Sermo online community found that only 16% are very confident their vendors will help secure incentives.

You won't hear those complaints and concerns from Dr. Lenita Hanson.

Dr. Hanson runs Ultra Care Endocrine & Diabetes Consultants in Venice, Florida. Her practice is an athenahealth pilot practice for MU certification and she has found that the unique, off-the-shelf services provided by athenaClinicals have gotten her off to an easy, pain-free start to MU certification.

athenaClinicals, athenahealth's EHR service, received complete ONC certification for Stage 1 MU on October 10, 2010. Since all providers are on a single instance of cloud-based software, just five days later all athenaClinicals clients were using a Stage 1 MU certified EHR. Any software changes to support MU – such as changing a template to accommodate newly required data – are pushed to all clients immediately due to the cloud-based nature of athenahealth's EHR.



### Instant and Free Updates Through the Cloud

Hanson converted from paper charts in 2002 and has never looked back. She benefits from the fact that her existing workflow meshed well with the tasks required under Stage 1. For starters, she already followed a process of reviewing charts the day before her patient appointments. So the added MU inputs for ethnicity and smoking status are simple.

"You should know if your patient is a smoker. It was not hard because we've been doing a lot of this already. You should have been capturing that documentation anyway. And it really doesn't take that much longer."

For example, if she has 20 charts to review, it might take an extra minute per chart. The work fits into her routine because it has always been required before the patient arrives.

"Someone needs to capture the information ahead of time," she says. "Once the patient is in the exam room you really don't have time to make these updates in the chart. You do not. It's too busy."

“I am against mandates. Most doctors are. But with athena, many of the measures are already there. athena makes it easy. It really does. As far as achieving Meaningful Use, it’s already built into the EHR. It’s easy to achieve Meaningful Use.”

- Lenita Hanson, MD, FACE,  
CDE, CPT

Since athenaClinicals is cloud-based, Hanson and other athenahealth providers don’t need a technician to install upgrades or change the software to reflect MU requirements. Whatever is needed is built into a template transparently by athenahealth and rolled out to all practices instantly at no extra cost.

And in addition to providing a nimble and adaptable EHR with a Pay-for-Performance dashboard, athenahealth coaches clients with MU webinars and provides an online MU Resource Center loaded with the latest information and helpful videos to ensure providers are taking the right steps throughout the process. All this, along with training, performance reports and proactive support are part of athenahealth’s standard service offering.



## Seeing Past the Pain to the Benefit

Hanson understands why doctors using other vendors are frustrated with MU. Like any business owner, she too must be mindful of cash flow and the need to comply with government requirements. The difference for Hanson, and for other athenahealth clients, is that athenahealth takes much of the burden of compliance off the practice so it can focus on patient care.

“I am against mandates. Most doctors are,” she says. “But with athena, many of the measures are already there. athena makes it easy. It really does. As far as achieving Meaningful Use, it’s already built into the EHR. It’s easy to achieve Meaningful Use.”

While many doctors view the EHR as an expensive technology with uncertain benefits, athenaClinicals has already proven its value to Hanson by decreasing costly errors and uncovering untapped sources of Pay-for-Performance revenue.

“EHRs are expensive but in my personal experience, actually, they’re not, because we captured more money through the EHR than prior to the EHR,” she says.



## Better Performance Along the Way

Not only has the beginning of the path to MU been smooth, but Hanson can’t believe how much better the practice performs on athenaClinicals. For example, electronic prescription is required under MU and it really does streamline her practice.

“E-prescribing is so much easier than regular prescribing. It’s a two-click thing. It’s a two-second process and that’s certainly easier. If a patient wants a prescription on Friday when the practice is closed, now it comes over my computer. I just two-click it and the patient gets the prescription. So, the efficiency of the office has improved.”

Hanson knows running a medical practice is hard work with high overhead costs and exposure to liability. She also realizes that the medical community is going through a tough transition now, whether in conversion from paper charts or attempting MU with a slow EHR system. She’s just begun the journey to Meaningful Use, but with athenahealth behind her she knows a little extra work today adds up to a better practice and healthier patients.

“After a year, most doctors should be able to see the benefit of the EHR,” she says. “In the long-term it provides easy access to patient information, quicker access to that information, reminders for patient care and, in the end, better patient care.”



there is a better way

athenahealth, Inc.  
311 Arsenal Street  
Watertown, MA 02472  
866.817.5738

At athenahealth, we know that every practice is different.

Contact us to find out how we can help you.

❖❖❖ 866.817.5738 or [athenahealth.com](http://athenahealth.com)