Merge Case Study
St. Joseph’s Imaging Associates
Achieving Greater Interoperability and Meaningful Use Compliance

How St. Joseph's Imaging Associates revamped its enterprise-wide imaging strategy for a more modern, efficient business approach

St. Joseph’s Imaging Associates | Syracuse, NY

The healthcare industry continues to adapt to regulatory change, making interoperable solutions a priority for all parts of the healthcare system. Imaging centers and other imaging-focused ambulatory practices across the nation are embracing this new world with enterprise-wide strategies to meet such industry challenges.

Based in Syracuse, NY, St. Joseph's Imaging Associates (SJIA) is a network of 10 imaging clinics and 23 radiologists, plus associated clinicians and staff, enjoying robust growth in imaging volume. As a growing organization, SJIA expects to add 50,000 imaging exams per year—bringing the system-wide volume to more than 300,000 exams per year—and needed to ensure its image management solutions and workflow could manage the increasing number of imaging exams.

Out with the old, in with the new

Like many of its medical imaging peers in early 2013, SJIA found itself juggling multiple challenges in an increasingly turbulent healthcare environment. Not only was the practice coming under pressure to meet Meaningful Use (MU) requirements or else face financial penalties, but SJIA was also in the midst of addressing significant growing pains as it sought to position itself for expansion in the increasingly competitive regional medical environment.

As part of this effort, SJIA leadership recognized it needed to make significant changes to its aging IT infrastructure, which included 1990s-era RIS and PACS systems that were nearing the end of their useful life. Olga Stanton, Director of Radiology at SJIA, recalled, "[The RIS and PACS] included a virtual private network, or VPN, that was so clunky most physicians eventually stopped using it."

"There was also the cost in time and money—not to mention inconvenience—of having to burn studies onto CDs that often would not run or open correctly on other physicians’ computer systems,” said Stanton. In addition, SJIA was concerned that its business-continuance capabilities would not be up to par in the event of a disaster or other significant disruption in service.

Success with Merge

While it initially considered simply replacing individual parts of the system, SJIA ultimately decided to replace its RIS/PACS technologies entirely with solutions in Merge’s Outpatient Radiology Suite, including Merge RIS™, Merge PACS™ and Merge Referral Portal™ to provide comprehensive, integrated document management and referring physician engagement. In addition, they added Merge’s iConnect® Access, to round out their interoperability capabilities by enabling referring physicians to remotely place orders and access reports and images.

CUSTOMER PROFILE
- Ten imaging clinics with 23 radiologists, plus associated clinicians, located throughout the Syracuse, NY, metropolitan area
- System-wide, imaging volume expected to exceed 300,000 exams by 2015

CUSTOMER CHALLENGES
- Desire to attest to MU
- Need to improve interoperability with referring physicians
- Need to replace aging PACS/RIS
- Provide business continuity for disaster recovery and power outages

SUCCESS WITH MERGE
- Reductions in duplicate data entry and errors
- Met MU attestation requirements
- Greatly improved speed and efficiency in processing imaging orders and payments, and exchanging images, reports and other data with referring physicians
- Improved total cost of ownership with an end-to-end solution

MERGE SOLUTIONS
- Merge PACS
- Merge RIS
- Merge Referral Portal
- iConnect Access
Simply put, Stanton said, “Modernizing its RIS/PACS system was one of the best actions the clinic has taken in recent years. Thanks to the greatly improved interoperability provided by Merge, SJIA and its thousands of referring physicians are enjoying dramatically faster and more efficient image-ordering and payment processing capabilities, as well as greatly reduced duplicate data entry and errors, and vastly improved sharing of patient images, reports and other data.” The entire, end-to-end solution also comes from one vendor, she added, providing for lower costs and greater efficiency of service.

Merge RIS, which enables SJIA to store, manage and distribute patient information with a radiology-specific electronic health record, is certified for MU. Combined with Merge PACS, a real-time picture and archiving communication system that enables secure access, review and image sharing from any web-based location, SJIA is able to enhance operational workflow and deliver faster results for improved patient care.

Additionally, iConnect Access allows SJIA providers to easily access and view images anywhere, anytime from any web-based browser. Coupled with Merge Referral Portal, a web-based portal for online referral ordering with access to real-time patient information for enhanced reporting, these solutions improve referrals with new and existing physicians.

Happier physicians, easier MU compliance
With Merge, SJIA’s referring physicians no longer have to call SJIA’s file room for their patients’ images and associated reports. They can simply go to the website and enter their patient’s name and information to access. Stanton added, “Most of SJIA’s file room staff have been reassigned to other responsibilities, as only one full-timer and one part-timer are now required to staff the file room.”

Compliance with MU requirements has also become easier, owing to the system’s ability to collect and manage data in real time. “The system makes it easy for us to collect, analyze and report the data needed for MU,” said Stanton, who noted that the Merge solutions’ superior data storage capabilities have also assuaged SJIA’s business-continuance concerns. “The benefits to our workflows and bottom line have been enormous,” Stanton added. “We’re estimating that we’re saving at least $100,000 a year already.”

About Merge
Merge is a leading provider of innovative enterprise imaging, interoperability and clinical systems that seek to advance healthcare. Merge’s enterprise and cloud-based technologies for image intensive specialties provide access to any image, anywhere, any time. Merge also provides clinical trials software with end-to-end study support in a single platform and other intelligent health data and analytics solutions. With solutions that have been used by providers for more than 25 years, Merge is helping to reduce costs, improve efficiencies and enhance the quality of healthcare worldwide. For more information, visit merge.com and follow us @MergeHealthcare.

These Merge solutions are not FDA cleared for diagnostic use on mobile devices.