Akron General Medical Center is a 537-bed, adult, tertiary-care, not-for-profit teaching hospital that serves a population of more than 1.2 million people throughout five counties in Northeast Ohio. It’s ranked among U.S. News and World Report’s "America’s Best Hospitals," Solucient’s “Top 100 Hospitals" in the nation, and was named a Consumer Choice Award winner for 2005-2006 by the National Research Corporation.

While these honors recognize the rigorous quality standards and compassionate healthcare services provided by the medical center— they also speak to its ongoing efforts to earn the trust of its patients.

Technology is increasingly tied to healthcare today; and has become an important part of Akron General’s daily efforts to improve patient care. For example, the medical center’s physicians now have wireless access to patient charts and test results—in real time— inside the hospital and from their offices. The hospital also employs advanced workflow-based applications through MedPlus ChartMaxx for Patient Accounts. The software program combines a patient’s financial and clinical data into one complete system, an approach that streamlines processes from registration to final billing and makes them more customer-friendly. And technology came to the forefront again, when the medical center’s leaders turned their attention to enhancing systems for patient safety and identification.

“In the past, we used blue cards, imprinters and embossers,” says Roger Edgington, Senior Project Leader for Akron General Medical Center’s Health Information Management department. “But we found that the identifiers on many of our chart forms were illegible. We needed documents that were identifiable during the patient stay, and after discharge, when the forms became part of our electronic imaging system.” Akron General Medical Center utilizes McKesson Plus 2000 as its HIS system and MedPlus ChartMaxx for document storage and retrieval. They needed a software program that could interface with both systems. Xerox Global Services, a vendor to Akron General, recommended that hospital leaders consider FormFast. After conversations with several vendors and site visits to facilities using forms on demand software, the hospital signed a contract to add FormFast to its facility. Edgington and his team quickly discovered that FormFast not only helped them increase patient safety and security, it also offered many unexpected benefits along the way. It’s a success story born of software design and excellent project management on the part of Akron General’s staff.

Once the hospital signed its contract with FormFast, Edgington and his team were charged with making the implementation a reality. The team decided to start the process in Admitting and the Psychiatric inpatient units. They developed the necessary registration forms and added bar code symbology (for use with medication administration and identification verification).

They assigned electronic numbers to each form and then developed packets so that forms that were generally used together could be ordered as a group, which streamlined the process even further. (cont.)
“This is the beauty of FormFast,” adds Edgington. “Before, our packets were assembled by volunteers. Now, the unit clerk orders forms directly through the computer. They’re generated in the correct order, and already labeled.” This convenience extends to commonly used forms as well as forms that might be needed only occasionally.

The implementation team worked diligently with unit clerks and area directors on those first implementations to ensure their satisfaction with the new system. Once they had buy-in from these key groups, the initial users became champions of the system throughout the hospital. The system went live in the Admitting and Psychiatric departments in December 2004 and quickly gained momentum. Ten months later, the medical center has 523 forms in production, has printed more than three million pages, and has realized tens of thousands of dollars in cost savings on pre-printed forms. As an added benefit, the medical center put all of its forms under close scrutiny: the medical center’s Forms Committee reviewed every form for JCAHO-compliance and duplication. “The conversion process really gave us a great opportunity to get our forms cleaned up,” Edgington adds.

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