

Full-Scale Evaluation of Transfer Center Options Leads UPMC Central Pennsylvania to ABOUT



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Ramin Yazdanfar, MD
Transfer Center Medical Director, UPMC Central Pennsylvania



UPMC
LIFE CHANGING MEDICINE

HEALTH SYSTEM SNAPSHOT

- Seven acute-care hospitals in central Pennsylvania
- 1,160 licensed beds, 160+ outpatient clinics and ancillary facilities
- 2,900+ physicians and approximately 11,000 employees
- UPMC Central Pa. has Joint Commission certification in advanced heart failure, advanced inpatient diabetes, advanced stroke, knee and hip surgery, and spine surgery

CHALLENGES

- Health system acquisitions and rapid growth exacerbated inefficient patient transfer practices
- Needed solution to help facilitate and track patient movement across seven sites

SOLUTION

The ABOUT solution provided UPMC Central Pa. with:

- Easy-to-navigate and user-definable software
- Integrated and centralized access to On-call Scheduling
- Holistic data insights and analytics of critical transfer center activities
- Clinical consulting providing best practices to ensure maximum ROI

HEALTH SYSTEM PROFILE

A health system based in Harrisburg, UPMC Central Pennsylvania includes seven acute-care hospitals with 1,160 licensed beds, more than 160 outpatient clinics and ancillary facilities, more than 2,900 physicians and allied health professionals, and approximately 11,000 employees. The healthcare hub serves Dauphin, Cumberland, Perry, York, Lancaster, Lebanon, Juniata, Franklin, Adams, and parts of Snyder counties of Pennsylvania. UPMC Central Pa. has earned Joint Commission certification in six areas, including advanced heart failure, advanced inpatient diabetes, advanced stroke, knee and hip surgery, and spine surgery.

CHALLENGES TO OVERCOME

Manual, Paper-based Processes Hampered Transfers

Healthcare mergers and acquisitions have a way of magnifying issues with processes and protocols. This certainly proved to be the case when the health system then known as Pinnacle Health grew from three to seven hospitals through the acquisition of four hospitals from Community Health Systems. Shortly thereafter, Pinnacle itself was acquired by the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center (UPMC) and is now known as UPMC Central Pa.

With this rapid growth came the recognition of significant shortcomings in the organization's patient transfer practices, according to Ramin Yazdanfar, MD, Transfer Center Medical Director, who joined Pinnacle just prior to the UPMC acquisition.

"There was a pressing need to get everyone on the same page in how we facilitate patient movement across the system. Everything was done on paper, even sticky notes, and the transfer center lacked coordination across all seven sites. There was no easy way to track issues with patient transfers — you basically had to root through a stack of papers," he recalls.

Dr. Yazdanfar and Connie Lauffer, System Director of Capacity Management, led the evaluation and selection of a transfer center partner and solution. At the outset, UPMC Central Pa. leadership already had one option: a transfer center solution offered by their electronic medical record (EMR) vendor. But, as easy as it might seem to go with a known entity, would the health system be better served by a company with a fundamental focus on patient transfer solutions?

THE EVALUATION AND SELECTION PROCESS

Significant Advantages Point to One Clear Choice

In search of an answer, Dr. Yazdanfar visited UPMC's MedCall transfer center, which had partnered with ABOUT for more than seven years. Due diligence also led him to another large, Pennsylvania-based, integrated healthcare system, which had deployed the EMR vendor's transfer center solution.

Following these visits and after a thorough evaluation process, the leadership of UPMC Central Pa. decided that the advantages offered by the ABOUT solution surpassed those of the EMR vendor's. In a presentation to the IT and finance departments, Dr. Yazdanfar and Lauffer outlined key advantages of implementing the ABOUT solution versus that of the health system's EMR vendor, including:

- **Specialized focus** — designed by a company that's 100% dedicated to the development, implementation, and ongoing support of not just patient transfers, but of orchestrating access across a full range of care settings
- **Flexible and reliable** — includes user- definable scripting for transfer center agents, ensuring that no detail is missed and eliminating the need for memorization
- **Easy-to-navigate workflow** — mirrors the actual sequence of a patient transfer
- **Expedited troubleshooting** — uses time-stamping of every step within the transfer process, making it easier and faster to pinpoint issues with a patient transfer
- **Support for faster referrals** — integrated and centralized access to On-call Scheduling, enabling agents to quickly identify physicians and providers who are currently available in any of the system's seven hospitals
- **Real-time decision support** — includes a diverse array of dashboards that are pre-built and easily shareable, without the need to submit a request to IT
- **Vendor-agnostic integrations** — ensures holistic reporting and analytics of all critical transfer center activities
- **Proven expertise** — comes with a tenured clinical consulting team to provide best practices and ensure maximum ROI

"We were really happy with what ABOUT had to offer upfront," states Dr. Yazdanfar.

VALIDATION OF THE HEALTH SYSTEM'S DECISION

Easy Implementation, Easy for Staff to Use

ABOUT proved to be the right choice for UPMC Central Pa, starting with an easy implementation of the solution, according to Dr. Yazdanfar, who adds: "We experienced very smooth integration of the ABOUT solution with our EMR solution."

Just as importantly, he says, "We needed a patient transfer solution that was easy for staff to learn how to use. That's exactly what we got. Very quickly, our transfer center was up to speed and effectively using the system. With a step-by-step checklist, ABOUT makes it so easy to capture all essential details from every call."

One of the solution's power users is Dr. Yazdanfar himself. "My day-to-day role includes reviewing pending transfers and addressing cases that are flagged by our transfer center team. ABOUT makes it easy for our agents to notify me, in real time, of an issue that needs to be resolved. I don't have to sort through hundreds of transfers to find the issue."

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Transfer Center Medical Director, UPMC Central Pennsylvania

Robust Reporting to Fuel Vital Initiatives

Thanks to ABOUT Decision Support, UPMC Central Pa. has gained reporting capabilities that far surpass what the EMR vendor was able to offer.

"Whatever the question related to patient transfers, we have the answers at our fingertips, which is a huge benefit for us," says Dr. Yazdanfar. This is especially important as UPMC Central Pa. strives to boost the volume of incoming transfers in a highly competitive market.

"We know we're leaking too many patients to other health systems, and we're committed to increasing referrals and the retention of current patients. But before we can make improvements, we need a better understanding of how many patients we're losing to competitors, why they're leaving our system, and the revenue involved. With the ABOUT solution we can do a better job of tracking and monitoring these trends."

Data gathered through the ABOUT solution will empower UPMC Central Pa. to make improvements in other areas. For example, because the transfer of patients is such a time-sensitive endeavor, reducing patient transfer times plays a major role in the satisfaction of referring physicians and their patients.

"We have to prove ourselves every day, with every call. We'd better darn well get it right the first time. If we do, providers will call again and send more patients to us," says Dr. Yazdanfar

More Than a Software Vendor — 'a True Partner'

After a little more than a year since deployment, UPMC Central Pa. has just begun to realize the full potential of its partnership with ABOUT. But already there have been a number of "wins," especially in terms of optimizing transfer center processes and delivering valuable intelligence to the health system's decision-makers.

One other thing is clear to Dr. Yazdanfar: "ABOUT is more than just a software company. Their solution is also about having a true partner who has been with us every step of the way. It's also a big plus for us to know we can talk to ABOUT experts whenever we have a question. This is not a feeling we've had with other major companies."

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Like many other health systems today, UPMC Central Pa. faced a crucial decision regarding the selection of a patient transfer partner and solution. Ultimately, the choices boiled down to ABOUT and the health system's current EMR vendor. Transfer Center Medical Director Ramin Yazdanfar, MD, framed the decision this way: "Would we choose a partner that has transfer center as a core strength, or one for which it's a sideline business?"

Following an exhaustive evaluation process, including visits to facilities using both solutions, UPMC Central Pa. chose ABOUT. This decision has been validated after several months of experience with ABOUT as a partner. Dr. Yazdanfar cites several key advantages:

- **Easy implementation** — including smooth integration with the EMR solution
- **Simple functionality** — easy for transfer center staff to use, with intuitive workflows and scripting to ensure that all important details are captured from every call
- **Support for troubleshooting** — includes time-stamping of calls, enabling fast identification and resolution of any issues with a patient transfer
- **Access to meaningful data** — provides the ability to quickly generate a variety of valuable reports, without the need for IT department assistance
- **Flexibility** — enables the tailoring of scripts, reports, and more to accommodate the health system's unique needs and preferences

Dr. Yazdanfar emphasizes that UPMC Central Pa. is in a relatively early phase of its experience with ABOUT and has only scratched the surface in terms of all the expected benefits. For example, the On-call Scheduling component, when activated, will enable transfer center staff to identify, in real time, the availability of physicians and other providers in all seven hospitals.

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Transfer Center Medical Director, UPMC Central
Pennsylvania

To see more client stories, visit
www.abouthhealthcare.com/case-studies.

About Us

ABOUT offers a flexible, purpose-built solution that empowers hospitals and health systems to operate as one connected network of care. We enable easy access for clinicians to move patients into and out of the acute care setting - getting them to the next, best care setting faster and easier. Complemented by our clinical experts and best practices, we provide health systems the necessary controls and insights to grow with resilience, drive clinician effectiveness, and improve patient outcomes.



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