



Bringing Cutting Edge Technology to Community Hospitals

Today CPSI is still catering to small hospitals, expanding to offer services to improve both business management and patient care capabilities for hospitals with fewer than 300 acute-care beds

BY FRANCES PACE PUTMAN

In 1979, hospitals across the United States were testing the waters with information technology (IT) systems that promised to revolutionize the healthcare industry. Start-up IT companies vied for business by targeting large, urban hospitals with their multi-faceted and often complex programs.

But Dennis Wilkins, a Mobile native and physicist, had a vision for a company that served smaller community hospitals, tailoring

services to meet their needs. With his partner, Kenny Muscat, who had worked in hospital IT, he created



David Dye, CPSI president and CEO

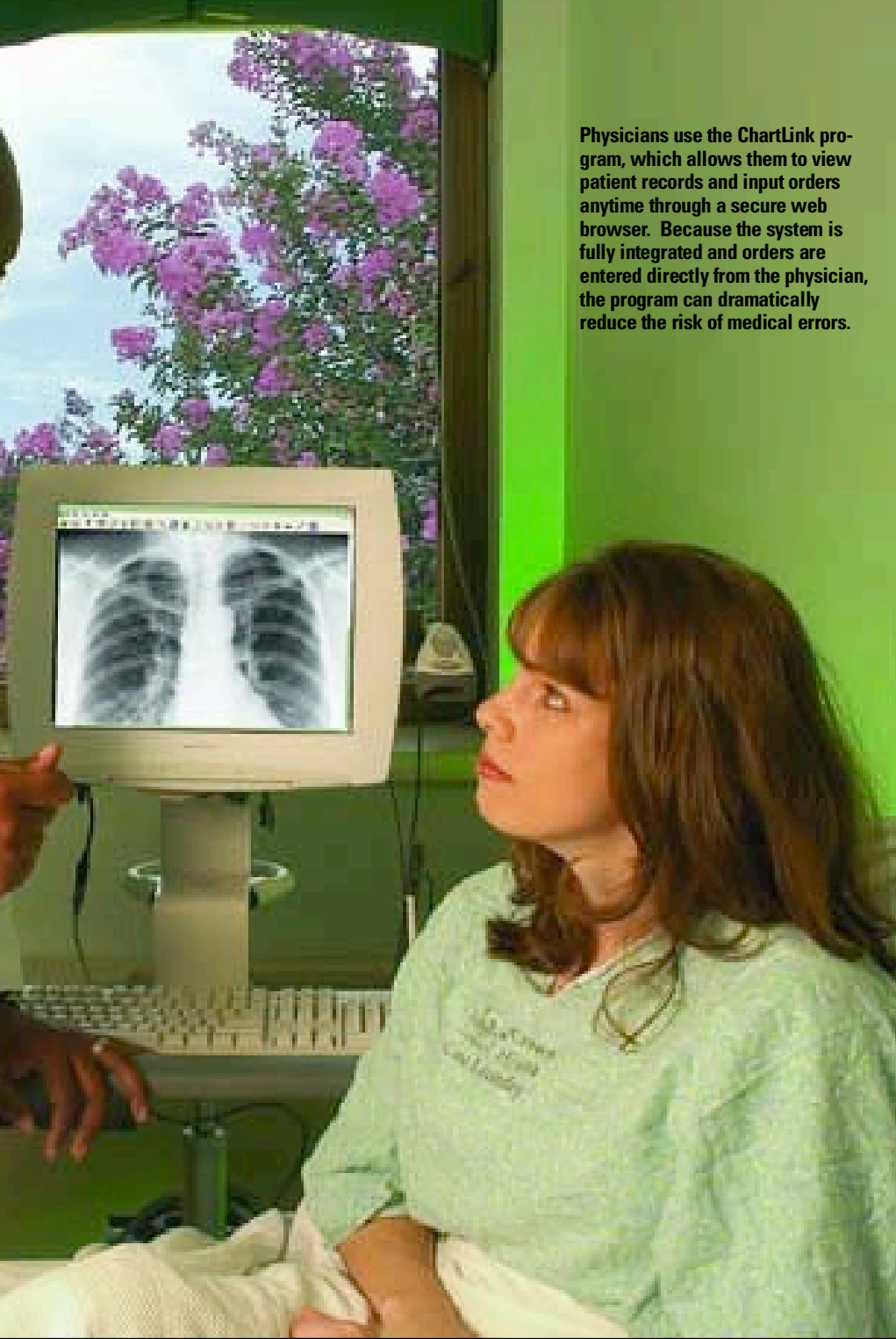
Computer Programs and Systems, Inc. (CPSI), and in 1981 the company installed its first systems, providing computerized patient financial accounting in local community hospitals. In the early years, the job often meant doing manual conversions from card files to a computerized system.

“Originally, community hospitals



were underserved,” says James Bouchard, senior administrative manager of the marketing department at CPSI. “We were able to help that niche to take advantage of the available technology.”

Today, CPSI is still catering to small hospitals, expanding to offer services to improve both business management and patient care capabilities for hospitals with fewer than 300



Physicians use the ChartLink program, which allows them to view patient records and input orders anytime through a secure web browser. Because the system is fully integrated and orders are entered directly from the physician, the program can dramatically reduce the risk of medical errors.

acute-care beds. Touting itself as a single-source provider, CPSI handles software, hardware, conversion services, implementation, training and continuing support services for its clients.

Once the CPSI system is in place, components can be customized to meet the client needs. CPSI can do everything from outsourcing payroll and patient billing to providing cut-

ting-edge digital technology. And, Bouchard says, every component of the CPSI system is designed within the company and integrated into the existing system. None of the programs are designed by outside sources.

"All of our programmers are actually hired and work here [in Mobile]," Bouchard says. "That's been the philosophy all along. We want to take the best possible care of our clients who

are trusting us with their data."

Fifteen years ago, Cary Medical Center in Caribou, Maine was searching for the right IT company when it found CPSI in Mobile, located more than 1,800 miles away. The selection process was rigorous, says David Silsbee, the hospital's chief information officer. But CPSI's approach appealed to this 65-bed facility in the northeastern-most corner of the United States.

CPSI understood the needs of the facility, he says, unlike some other companies whose systems were too cumbersome for a smaller community hospital.

"We were able to get the basic system and add on other packages later," says Silsbee. "CPSI's philosophy of a one-stop shop for hospitals was appealing. It saves tremendously on overhead when everything is available in one place."

Today, CPSI handles much of the billing for Cary Medical Center, actually sending out statements from its Mobile headquarters. The hospital has added several components, including ones that handle medical testing and pharmacy services. And, several physicians are using the ChartLink program, which allows them to view patient records and input orders anytime through a secure web browser. Because the system is fully integrated and orders are entered directly from the physician, the program can dramatically reduce the risk of medical errors.

"There is clearly a patient-service benefit when errors can be avoided," Silsbee notes.

One of the newest options available to CPSI clients is the ImageLink Picture Archiving and Communications System (PACS), which allows physicians to easily and securely access images from magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), ultrasound, nuclear medicine, radiography and other imaging systems online. The program

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receives digital images, then organizes them by physician preference, making them available as part of a patient's record any time the physician needs them.

"We're really excited about this," Bouchard says.

CPSI now has more than 500 clients in 45 states — from California to Florida to Thomas Hospital in Fairhope, just across Mobile Bay — and employs 675 people at its south Alabama headquarters. The vast majority of those jobs, Bouchard says, are in customer service, where the company prides itself on being a leader in the field.

"Without question, the single most important function of CPSI is sup-

porting our current clients," says David Dye, CPSI's president and chief executive officer. "All of our long-term goals will take care of themselves if we focus on providing our clients with quality support."

Silsbee says this is a philosophy the company stands behind.

"They listen to our needs, particularly on new products," he says. "They are clearly interested in what they can do to make a better product."

This commitment to service has paid off well for the company. In 2003, CPSI had over \$81 million in total revenue, an increase of just over 10 percent from the previous year. As an example of the impact the company has had on the Mobile economy,

Bouchard points out that CPSI, with its nationwide client base and outsourcing services, is the single largest user of the Mobile Regional Airport and the largest bulk mail user of the U.S. Postal Service in the city.

While CPSI has been good for Mobile, the region has been great for the company. With the University of South Alabama and its College of Medicine located nearby, CPSI has been able to attract a strong base of employees.

"The work force of highly qualified healthcare and technical professionals available locally provides a ready source of staffing for our support operations," Dye says.

Another advantage to companies doing business nationally or globally relates to the city's transportation options.

"Mobile has easy access to transportation lines, including our deep-water port, two interstates, two airports and five major railways that connect us to anywhere in the U.S.," notes Ashley Collins, director of communications for the Mobile Area Chamber of Commerce. "Our city is an outstanding location for high-tech and healthcare companies because of the area's quality of life and low cost of living."

With Mobile's strong business base, not to mention its location near the beaches of the Gulf of Mexico, it hasn't been hard to recruit others to come to the area.

"The economic environment in Mobile promotes profitable operations with sustainable growth and provides our employees with a great quality of life at a reasonable cost of living," Dye says. "We are an Alabama company and firmly believe that all of the ingredients necessary to achieve continued success are here in Alabama."



For drug administration, the final opportunity to ensure patient safety is at the patient's bedside. Recognizing that fact, CPSI developed Medication Administration Verification — a fully integrated and wireless point of care method for safer medication administration.

ChartLink provides physicians with secure, immediate and interactive access to patient medical records

A family-practice physician wakes up early in the morning, logs on to his home computer and checks the status of his patients. Over coffee, he looks at the latest X-rays, ancillary test results and updated progress reports. He enters his notes, orders a few more tests and makes a couple of medication changes. By the time he arrives at the hospital later that morning, his patients have received the care he recommended.

“At that point, he is well ahead of the game,” says David Silsbee, chief information officer at Cary Medical Center in Caribou, Maine. And patients have received proper care more quickly and efficiently than they might have in the past.

A client of CPSI, Cary Medical Center is one of many community hospitals across the country now using ChartLink, a web-enabled application providing physicians with secure, immediate and interactive access to patient medical records through the CPSI system.

“ChartLink gives physicians a virtual chart, with real-time information that they can access anytime,” says James Bouchard, senior administrative

manager of the marketing department at CPSI. “The more information you can bring together in one place, the more you enhance the healthcare decision-making process and reduce the opportunity for errors.”

With ChartLink’s Computerized Physician Order Entry (CPOE) feature, physicians place direct orders,

types in the order. Fewer steps in the ordering process mean fewer chances for human error.

“It is fully-integrated with other parts of the system, like pharmacy, so there are safety checks on medication orders, to catch things like food allergies,” Bouchard says.

A report by the Institute of Medicine in 2000 found that between 44,000 and 98,000 deaths in the United States each year are caused by medical errors. The report further estimated that the annual financial cost of these preventable errors runs between \$17 billion and \$29 billion nationally.

The Leapfrog group, a healthcare watchdog organization, has suggested that the number one way to improve patient safety is through the increased use of CPOE systems, reducing the need for handwritten or telephone-placed orders and increasing patient safety by cutting down on misinterpretation or transcription errors.

“Patient safety is a tremendous concern,” says Silsbee. “Optimizing safety is certainly our goal and ChartLink helps us reach that goal.”

So far, hospitals have allowed physicians to choose whether or not to use CPOE programs, since user buy-in is considered imperative to their success. The issue has become a hot-button topic in the

medical community. But positive results and peer pressure from other physicians are increasing the demand for the programs. ■



ChartLink Computerized Physician Order Entry expands the functionality of CPSI’s Internet-based virtual chart — Chartlink — and provides physicians with a new level of convenience in providing care for their patients.

which means an order to the pharmacy goes immediately to the pharmacy. It isn’t given to a nurse who contacts a pharmacy technician who