

The VHA National Teleradiology Program Simultaneously Improved Operational Performance, Workload Planning and Physician Engagement



Veterans Health Administration

Historically, the VHA's National Teleradiology Program (NTP) has been in high demand, with a waiting list of VA Medical Centers interested in using their high-quality services. Efficiently scaling to meet the growing need while maintaining high quality standards and sound financial performance became an ongoing challenge. Initially, NTP management relied on retrospective reports and spreadsheets for business planning. The absence of timely data negatively impacted stakeholder collaboration and limited their ability to attain committed business goals. It became clear that real-time access to actionable data insights was imperative to support NTP's much sought after growth.

IMPROVED BUSINESS PERFORMANCE

To monitor its operational performance and adopt continuous improvement practices, the NTP deployed Foundations™ from HealthLevel. NTP worked closely with its physicians, its operations department, and its IT team to implement Foundations™. Within 30 days, resource planning with real-time data was automatically synthesized with staff calendars. This initial success led to additional requests and Foundations™ is now an integral part of NTP's operations—supporting system monitoring, resource planning, clinical quality metrics, and stakeholder collaboration.

Using Foundations™ each radiologist reviews meaningful, personalized, and secure insights about their performance with relevant business and clinical context. Staffing decisions are driven by insights revealed within Foundations™, along with trend models that assist with business planning and strategic growth.

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STEPWISE ADOPTION

With the actionable insights Foundations™ revealed, NTP could analyze its current operations and monitor caseloads, case types, and case complexity – all segmented by location. Additionally, NTP could more effectively plan and manage physician schedules, overtime, and general workload.

With their core operations now optimized, NTP next began deploying Foundations™ at participating VA Medical Centers (their customers) to understand how to better serve their needs. HealthLevel added collaboration tools for sharing information about urgent cases, workflow patterns, billing codes, and accounting reconciliation. Today, Foundations™ is employed across NTP's customer network to monitor quality metrics and teleradiology workload audits.

Utilizing Foundations™ to gain insights about its operations, plan its business growth, and improve its customers' collaborative experience, NTP delivers high-quality, fast, and more efficient care for its customers and their patients. That success has led to a significant increase in overall diagnostic imaging volume for NTP.

BALANCING WORKLOADS

To effectively manage workloads and ensure optimal staffing, operational metrics like case types and patient flow patterns by time and day need to be combined with scheduling data from staff calendar applications. Foundations™ enables NTP to blend data from various sources (e.g., patient flow and physician calendars) into a comprehensive model for more accurate and efficient planning decisions, which can improve the quality and timeliness of results. This is especially important for time-sensitive cases such as stroke protocols. As a result, NTP has been able to grow their business and meet service level agreements without compromising their high-quality standards.

ENGAGING PHYSICIANS

Making qualitative and quantitative performance data available to individual physicians increased both engagement and accountability. Detailed information such as productivity ratios as well as qualitative metrics (e.g., peer review, critical case call-backs, report quality) are made available to each physician in near real time, along with comparative historical data. Additionally, physicians have access to personalized metrics based on CPT codes to analyze individual performance compared to group metrics and objectives. Examples include read times and adjusted RVU (relative value units) based on case complexity, to instill fairness and trust.



THE BOTTOM LINE

In the more than 10 years since implementing Foundations™, the VA's NTP has grown from providing their teleradiology services to seven sites to now having over 6,000 registered users across 125 sites. In addition, their operational efficiency has improved 44% since they began using Foundations™. This was achieved by continuously improving trust and transparency across the organization, efficiently collaborating with customers, and proactively addressing quality issues.

The ability for operations managers to view real-time data against historical trends which enables them to track current performance against business goals and objectives has also had a powerful impact. Leadership and management processes are more efficient because data accuracy is trusted and personalized, confidential metrics are available to physicians so they can track and compare their performance. The organization is empowered, aligned, and focused on improving access and care for our veterans and their families.