

St. Anne Mercy: Getting its volume and keeping its value, too

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Tanya English, Mercy Health

Often lost amid all the talk of U.S. health-care's volume-to-value transformation is the plain and simple truth that volume doesn't stop mattering just because value matters more than it did before. This is especially germane to provider organizations caring for patients at the population level.

At Mercy Health–St. Anne Hospital in Toledo, Ohio, a Premier GPO member and part of the seven-hospital, 20-county Mercy Health system, Tanya English, director of project implementation and

development, is intent on excelling at both value and volume.

Nowhere is the dual focus more evident than at the hospital's satellite Mercy Health–Sylvania Outpatient Imaging Center, where English oversaw the selection, acquisition and April 2015 installation of a Hitachi Oasis 1.2T MRI system, the highest field strength open MRI on the market.

A year later, overall daily MRI volumes at the site have doubled. For some exams, they've tripled.

"We knew that, quality-wise, this platform would give us excellent images," English told ImagingBiz in a recent interview. But the team couldn't have known that they would have virtually zero downtime.

This has meant that, without interruption, radiologists have been getting superb images and streamlined workflows, English reports, while referrers get fast and accurate diagnoses leading to better outcomes.

Not least, technologists are enjoying the unbroken uptime serving cooperative patients who seldom need efficiency-busting, cost-inflating repeat scans.

"Our health system is all about being patient-centric," English says, "and that is what drove our decision."

Patients and all stakeholders have been so pleased that Mercy

Health has ordered a second Oasis for May delivery and June installation at a separate satellite site, Oregon Medical Office Building, in Oregon, Ohio.

Patients of all shapes, sizes, states of mind

With the investment in Hitachi Oasis technology, St. Anne is showing that investing in the right technology can go a long way toward helping a large provider system meet the Institute for Healthcare Improvement's Triple Aim goals: elevating the health status of entire populations while reducing costs and optimizing the patient experience.

Zeroing in on the latter, English says the Oasis has produced particular increases in pediatric studies. "With the open platform, Mom can be in the suite holding the patient's hand," she affirmed. Orthopedic referrals also have increased.

The demographics in Greater Toledo are such that, like most of the U.S. in 2016, many patients need bariatric MRI capabilities. Meanwhile, this population characteristic ensures a steady stream of joint problems.

Adding to the orthopedic workload are the many sports participants who live in the area.

"With this scanner you can isocenter upper extremities without having the patient belly-down, arms raised," English explains. "Everyone—not just bariatric and claustrophobic patients—is a lot more comfortable lying supine, arms down by their sides in a very natural position.

"So we're capturing orthopedic patients as well as large but non-bariatric patients whose shoulders would have been right up against the wall of the magnet, and improperly isocentered, in a traditional wide-bore platform."

English shares an anecdote that illustrates just how paradigm-changing the platform can be.

One day, when she happened to be in the room, an orthopedic patient came in for a scan and remarked that he'd tried but failed to have MRI exams several times in the past. It turned out that he

struggled to accept being enclosed in a small space because, as a child, he'd had a traumatic experience involving confinement.

"He was relieved just looking at the Oasis," English recalls. "He said, 'I've never been able to do an MRI scan, but I'm going to try this one. I think I can do it.' Then he got on the patient table, said he felt fine and went through with the scan, with no problems at all."

It's hard to imagine a better patient experience than one that is equal parts a necessary medical exam and, potentially, a life-changing accomplishment.

Uncompromised image quality

English, who clearly has customer service down to an art as well as a science, says she often visits the radiology reading room to get a bead on any issues or concerns percolating among those doing the reading.

She says she frequently hears words that are music to her ears: "The image quality is great with this scanner."

"The radiologists are very pleased with the images from the Oasis," she says. "It used to be that when you were thinking about patient comfort and open magnets, you expected a decrease in image quality. It was one or the other—image quality or comfortable patients. Now we get both. It's a win-win."

As for the technologists, they've found the system easy to learn and consistently rewarding to use.

"It has actually brought about an increase in job satisfaction because it has decreased patient anxiety," English explains. Where many patients once required coaxing, reassuring and lots of in-and-outs—not to mention study re-orders with sedation—now, "the techs don't have to do any of that," she shares.

Here, English reiterates that topnotch images coupled with compliant patients who don't balk, move or otherwise avoid the scan add up to St. Anne providing better care to improve population health at reduced costs.

"The Oasis has a uniqueness, and we are innovators," she says. "Not everyone has one of these. We really wanted to offer this innovation to our patient population, and we're excited to be doing so now."

English also has kind words for Hitachi's sales and service people. "When we've had any questions or issues, we've gotten great service" from both those groups, she says.

"That gave us confidence, moving forward, to get the second Oasis," English says. "The decision was just a slam-dunk: 'Let's get another open scanner,' we said. 'Let's call Hitachi right now.'"

Stated another way: Value and volume really can co-exist.