



A Day in the Life of
Geoff Brown
SVP, Chief Information Officer
Inova Health System

Brown Deploys IT Capabilities to Inova to Improve Care

Geoff Brown's life intersected with the healthcare system when a relative in his family needed hospice care. It changed his career direction completely.

Brown, now senior vice president and CIO at Inova Health System, had been using his IT knowledge and experience in the financial industry. Working with hospice staff and volunteers ultimately led to his considering a career in healthcare.

"It was the first time I felt that meaningful link you hear about," Brown recalls. "That really touched me and to a significant degree changed my life."

Brown was able to design and implement some automation to help the hospice staff workers deal with their workloads. The basic database applications he designed assisted workers with patient flow and documentation; it enabled workers in the field to collect important information about patients in order to better record their care and document information to help personalize their visits.

"At the time, I worked in the banking industry where the use of leading technology solutions was part of the culture," Brown said. "It was appalling to see how little automation and IT there was to help connect the dots in healthcare."

Fast forward two decades plus, and Brown is still implementing technologies to help business and caregivers align and leverage the utilization of

technology. However, he's now leading one of the most technologically advanced integrated delivery systems in the country, and he's directing a team of IT professionals to put complex technologies into place.

It's no small task at Inova, a fully integrated healthcare delivery system with 1,725 inpatient beds, more than 3,100 physicians, 416 nursing home beds, and 400,000 emergency department visits. Under Brown's leadership, Inova has shifted completely to electronic records in all five of its emergency departments and three emergency care centers. Late in 2009, Inova deployed a computerized provider order entry (CPOE) system that is being rolled out at all Inova hospitals.

Two months after the go-live date for CPOE, Brown noted that its implementation has several levels of complexity that involved coordination and cooperation among many groups within and outside of the organization.

"Preparing for deployment took about two years of work," he said. "It required building up a system of cross-collaboration with our community-based physicians. We had doctors from each of our facilities working on order set development, and on standardizing medical protocols utilizing evidence-based tools. When patients present for care at any Inova facility, they will receive a consistent level of care based on industry best practice and pathways."

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Standardizing care required more than simply getting clinician agreement on how to treat patients with certain conditions. “A number of processes had to be bridged together,” Brown said. “Although the model used was similar, each facility had policies that were unique to their operation. CPOE really helped us standardize workflow related to order communication, decision support, and the management of the downstream handoffs. I cannot overstate the importance of the front-end foundation work that must be performed for CPOE to be well implemented.”

CPOE meetings involved a variety of interactions for Brown, including governance committees, ancillary departments, and clinicians. CIOs typically connect with many groups of individuals within a healthcare organization, aiming to gain consensus and support from users, and alignment of business and strategic initiatives with system leadership.

Brown also has responsibility for ensuring that the information technology infrastructure is robust enough to support IT’s widespread use throughout the organization. “As Inova uses computers more widely in all aspects of caregiving, the importance of a strong infrastructure becomes paramount,” he said.

“With the old disaster recovery model, a combination of dual file copies and backup tapes was typically used to recover information or reconstruct an application.” Brown said. “As we move more processes online, the implications of downtime become magnified, and are not easily tolerated because staff require the system to perform their assignments.

“Most of us initially became CIOs because we were either very knowledgeable of the healthcare business and/or IT. About 40 percent of my time as CIO is spent driving strategy and tactics with focus on the value proposition. IT has moved from being a data processing function to one that is strategically critical in the achievement of business goals and driving improvement throughout the organization.”