South Georgia Radiology Associates Expands Practice With Cloud-based RamSoft PowerServer PACS Hosted by Radius

In 2006, Gary H. Dent, M.D., founded South Georgia Radiology Associates (SGRA) with the goal of providing high-caliber imaging and teleradiology services to rural and under-served areas throughout Southeast Georgia. The practice grew quickly; by January of 2009, Dent—who like his work colleagues lives in the communities SGRA serves, had signed contracts with three hospitals and was seeking to extend SGRA’s reach to other institutions.

However, this was easier said than done, with several factors compromising workflow efficiencies and causing study turnaround time to exceed desired targets. For example, each hospital had its own PACS system, rendering it impossible for studies executed at one facility to be viewed from on-site workstations at another facility. Access to images, which was provided via virtual private network (VPN), was often impeded by bandwidth and connectivity issues. The inability to generate unified worklists only complicated matters.

To reverse the tide, Dent sought out a single PACS solution that would, by streamlining SGRA’s workflow and facilitating study turnaround, better position the practice for growth while supporting top-tier service and patient care. His requirements were simple, but non-negotiable: The solution had to offer a cohesive, unified worklist feature, as well as built-in reporting and voice recognition capabilities. It also had to have, as Dent calls it, a “small IT footprint”, with no necessary capital investment in dedicated servers and VPN connections for any facility whatsoever.

Dent found what he was looking for in a cloud-based version of RamSoft’s PowerServer PACS, hosted and managed by RamSoft partner Radius. “It met all my criteria,” he says, adding that the data transmission security and HIPAA compliance afforded by PowerServer PACS’ SQL database platform and use of TLS encryption was the final catalyst in his decision to implement the technology.
Improved Workflow

As anticipated, PowerServer PACS has had, and continues to have, a positive impact on SGRA’s workflow. The solution is 100 percent Web-based, yielding its eight radiologists anytime, anywhere access to studies with no need for VPN connections, Web servers, or Citrix and leveraging the same familiar layout, settings and functionality wherever log-in occurs. Practitioners can provide coverage for multiple facilities at the same time when demand warrants, keeping studies moving through the queue and, just as significantly, permitting all hospitals to receive the identical high level of service no matter what the practice’s imaging volume.

Effortless generation of the desired unified worklists also bolsters workflow efficiencies by providing all practitioners with identical information about which studies are in the queue, regardless of the fact that their physical paths do not cross on a regular basis. Worklists may also be customized by modality, body part, facility, physician, or virtually any other variable, resulting in additional productivity gains.

“For example, if I see from the worklist that one facility has 50 studies waiting to be read, but another has just 10, I can make the necessary adjustments to balance things out,” Dent explains. “I can do the same if I notice that one radiologist seems to be overloaded with studies while a colleague has a light load.”

Attaining such a level of efficiency would never have been possible without the unified worklist functionality afforded by the PowerServer PACS solution, he observes.

Dent adds that PowerServer PACS’ integrated voice recognition and reporting functions play a key role here as well. While he was unable to quantify the increase in the volume of studies SGRA can produce as a result of implementing the technology, he notes that study turnaround times have decreased significantly, with “stat” reports available in about 20 minutes versus upwards of one hour and even complicated mammography reports ready within a window of about three-and-one-half hours. Additionally, eliminating handwritten reports and manual report transcription has wrought marked improvements in reporting accuracy, not only minimizing delays caused by the need to correct errors but also supporting the caliber of service and care afforded to hospitals and patients served by the practice.

No Headaches

Meanwhile, opting for a cloud-based PowerServer PACS solution rather than investing in servers and other equipment means SGRA can easily expand the roster of hospitals and imaging facilities to which it provides teleradiology services, at an entirely manageable cost. The solution is hosted at Radius’ Tier II data facility, which coupled with round-the-clock virtual support, frees Dent up from the headaches and unpredictable expenses inherent in managing a PACS platform.

He adds that the overall efficiency enhancements wrought by PowerServer PACS, combined with the “ability to expand without initial capital expenditures and the additional cost of upgrades and repairs” have indeed positioned SGRA for short- and long-term growth alike. Since implementing the solution, SGRA has added five hospitals to its teleradiology services roster, for a total of eight facilities. An imaging center also engages the practice for teleradiology services on a part-time basis, and two additional hospitals will come on board shortly. A ninth radiologist is slated to join the staff in July of 2012, allowing for the addition of a neuroradiology service line.

“If another hospital or imaging facility approached me and asked for services next week, I would be able to say ‘yes’ without hesitation,” Dent concludes. “Had we not partnered with RamSoft and Radius for PowerServer PACS, I can’t imagine I could make that claim.”

“The monitoring component and rapid response we enjoy with the solution have been top-notch,” Dent observes. “On rare occasions, I am not informed of a problem until after it has been fixed. The vendor relationship between SGRA, RamSoft, and Radius is superb.”