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Froedtert Health & OrbitalRX

Froedtert overhauls shortage management with all-in-one platform

Froedtert Health is a leading referral resource for advanced medical care. It operates the region's only adult Level I trauma center. The primary adult teaching affiliate of the Medical College of Wisconsin, Froedtert Hospital is a major training facility for more than 1,000 medical, nursing, and health technical students annually. It is also a respected research center, participating in some 2,000 research studies every year. Froedtert Health is recognized by U.S. News & World Report in 2020-21 as high performing in five adult specialties: diabetes and endocrinology, gastroenterology and GI surgery, nephrology, pulmonology and lung surgery, and urology, as well as seven procedures and conditions.

One of Froedtert's core values is "deliver excellence," which it defines as "We set the standard that others aspire to by always asking, 'What more can we do?'" When such self-reflection encouraged pharmacy leaders to question how they were managing drug shortages, they began a journey that would see them radically transform the organization's shortage management.

Froedtert was relying upon internally developed, time-intensive spreadsheets coupled with multiple systems to manage, monitor, and respond to drug shortages. For an organization that prides itself on leveraging cutting-edge solutions, as indicated by its mission of, "We advance the health of the people of the diverse communities we serve through exceptional care enhanced by innovation and discovery,"

this management method felt archaic. It also created some challenges for those team members tasked with drug shortage management, says Brian Pella, PharmD, clinical pharmacist and drug shortage coordinator at Froedtert Hospital and the Medical College of Wisconsin.

Acknowledging that the usage of multiple systems and spreadsheets was no longer a viable option and desiring a data-driven method for managing drug shortages, the pharmacy leaders set out to find a better solution.

"We needed to jump from inventory systems to usage systems to the different spreadsheets we were personally keeping track of to gather all our data around drug shortages and communicate that data to other individuals who would need this information," Pella says. "There was a lot of manual work. There was also uncertainty around the organization of information, the right places to store information for ease of access, and whether tasks had been completed."

Solution

After researching several options, Froedtert selected OrbitalRX with Micromedex, an innovative drug shortage and supply chain management platform for hospital pharmacies. This data-unifying solution proactively manages drug shortages through predictive analysis and real-time situational awareness in a pharmacy-focused workflow.

From the moment they saw a demo of the platform, Froedtert's pharmacy team recognized the numerous ways OrbitalRX could improve their inventory and shortage management and also support efforts to improve drug shortage coordination across the health system. This functionality took on even greater significance with the emergence of COVID-19.

Results: all data in one place leads to improved efficiency

Froedtert went live with OrbitalRX in 2019 and ramped up its reliance on the platform, supported by the OrbitalRX team every step of the way. "We closely collaborated with the team at OrbitalRX on implementation and adding our current inventories to the system," Pella says. "The team was more than willing to have ongoing weekly and then monthly meetings to ensure the system was working the way we wanted and needed it to. Any questions and queries were always addressed fast."

It wasn't long before the platform became Froedtert's sole source for inventory information on drug shortages, eliminating the need to go into disparate systems and spreadsheets for current details. OrbitalRX is being used by Froedtert's inpatient pharmacies and inpatient pharmacy buyers, managers, coordinators, and clinical pharmacists across the Froedtert system to track its shortages and inventories, document information shared with and provided by other hospitals concerning medication shortages and communicate requests for shortage-related tasks.

OrbitalRX provides a consolidated, single view into all the organization's drug shortages, helping the centralized shortage management team find the information they need quickly.

"Everyone has access to this one dashboard, which is so much more efficient than needing to go into multiple systems and spreadsheets like we were before," Pella says. "OrbitalRX tracks the medications that are experiencing shortages and our current supplies. We can sort this information by site, which is very useful and helpful, and easily communicate about shortages across sites."

This systemwide snapshot has proven to be quite valuable, Tiry says. "Being able to see our quantity on hand across all different areas we manage drug shortages and then being able to transfer inventory as appropriate, so we do not run out of inventory is a definite win."
The dashboard has also dramatically reduced the time spent on communication, which Tabitha Andrist, BS, CPhT, medication shortage specialist for Froedtert, says is hugely beneficial. "It's really helpful to have that one place where we can go and learn everything we need to about a shortage versus having to reach out to one another to learn that information or ask where we can find it. Now that other sites within Froedtert are using OrbitalRX, it will be helpful for them as well as it will save them a phone call or email and reduce any panic if they can't get ahold of one of us on the drug shortage team. They will now have somewhere to look to get the information they need."

"It was a smooth implementation," says Kristin Tiry, pharmacy manager for Froedtert. Since the OrbitalRX team had experience with our inventory management systems, their expertise helped us transition quickly. I was surprised just how little we needed to be involved in some of the implementation work."

Tiry has seen just how useful it is for Pella and Andrist to coordinate their work via the platform, particularly with Andrist recently moving to partial remote status. "OrbitalRX has definitely made that transition easier. They now have a platform they can utilize for better communication between each other. In addition, when one of them is taking time off work, the other can go in know exactly where things stand. There's no more sifting through spreadsheets, emails, or SharePoint.

The value of OrbitalRX's various features has been magnified during the public health crisis. There are a few different shortages directly linked to the COVID-19 pandemic which Froedtert tracks within OrbitalRX. "With that information, we can act much more proactively in managing these shortages," Pella says. "By getting this up-to-date information everyday, we're able to act accordingly and usually with enough time so we can either mitigate a shortage by using an alternative drug or at least get information communicated to those providers who might need to know about and then act on it."

Froedtert's ability to respond effectively and efficiently is enhanced by OrbitalRX's ease of use, Pella says. "It's an extremely user-friendly program. It's easy to navigate through. It's easy to document in. Most importantly, it gives you the information you're looking for right on the system's main page; no need to go searching through other files, documents, or systems."

"That's great for me as well," Tiry adds. "If both are away from medication shortage management and shortage questions come in, I can jump into the platform and know exactly where to find the answers."

The organization also benefits from the OrbitalRX team's commitment to customer service and satisfaction.

"The turnaround time is top notch for any tickets that get logged from our shortage team," says Tiry. "Those are turned around in just a few hours, which is incredible when you compare that to other vendors we work with. When you're able to get issues resolved fast, you can continue moving forward and getting your work done. It's nice how quickly we can forget that there even was an issue. My shortage team really appreciates that about the OrbitalRX team."

Andrist adds, "When I reach out to support for assistance, not only do they respond quickly, but they continue to follow up and provide updates on the issue until it is resolved."

Staying ahead of shortages

Pella and Andrist have observed numerous ways OrbitalRX directly affect Froedtert's ability to respond to drug shortages and the productivity of staff tasked with helping manage shortages.

"With OrbitalRX, we get ahead of more shortages than we previously did," Pella says. "By having all the information in one system, we can recognize what drug shortages are most problematic and then act accordingly. We are caught off guard significantly less since OrbitalRX was implemented at our hospitals. Information from problematic shortages can be accessed faster using OrbitalRX, so our time is spent actively addressing shortages, not sifting through usage and inventory data."

That's not the only way OrbitalRX is helping with time management, Andrist says. "The system takes care of so many of the manual tasks we used to perform. This frees up time so we can put our efforts toward more critical tasks."

Pella adds, "Tracking shortages with multiple pieces of data from multiple systems is time consuming and inefficient. OrbitalRX makes shortage management less stressful since it brings everything together for us."

Andrist says she cannot imagine trying to do her job without OrbitalRX. "I'm in there all day long, every day. I refer to it constantly. Looking at not only our usage and supply on hand, but our other sites as well. I am able to refer to my notes from previous weeks and remind myself of the specifics on that particular shortage. My job revolves around the information in OrbitalRX. Without having all that information in one place, we would be lost."

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Kristin Tiry
Pharmacy Manager

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