

A community hospital plans for success.

Jan Moore, Director of Consulting Services

Johnston Memorial Hospital in Smithfield, NC, is like many other MEDITECH community-based hospitals. They are a 175-bed acute care hospital with multiple satellite outreach facilities, including family care, urgent care, surgical services, and rehab facilities.

Like all healthcare providers, their goal is to provide quality care, and ensuring patient safety is a top priority for the organization. They recognize that with the latest tools, their medical staff can do a better, and more efficient, job. And like other community-focused hospitals of this size, Johnston Memorial must deal with the realities of operating with a constrained budget. In this environment, planning—clearly identifying the priorities of the organization—is a strategic necessity.

Because of JJWild's long-standing relationship with Johnston Memorial Hospital and our knowledge of MEDITECH's direction in the healthcare information system market, we were asked to help the hospital develop an IT Strategic Plan. As always, we took a highly collaborative approach. Our objective was to serve as facilitator, mentor, and educator in order to enable the hospital to chart the best possible course for the future—keeping in mind the limitations of budget, resources, and time.

Without teamwork, nothing happens.

In today's environment, an IT Strategic Plan has to have the support of multiple parties: the board, the medical staff, the hospital executive staff, and the hospital management team. So the first step in developing an IT Strategic Plan is to bring together a strong team, with representatives from each of these groups. With JJWild's assistance, Johnston Memorial Hospital selected key members from all four groups, and formed an Information Technology Advisory Board. A mission statement was clearly defined and distributed, and everyone got ready for the first big meeting.

JJWild facilitated a brainstorming session in which significant initiatives from all groups were submitted, discussed, and documented. This highly interactive group effort resulted in 18 overall initiatives, including:

1. Intranet
2. Web-based patient and community access to education materials
3. Technology upgrades (desktop hardware, software)
4. Data archiving and repository
5. Single sign-on
6. Imaging interfaces (vitals, EKG, fetal monitoring)
7. Alphanumeric paging evaluation
8. Automatic bar code scanning to capture charges
9. Planning for bed tower reconstruction
10. Web-based patient feedback solution
11. Board and senior management metrics
12. Return on Investment (ROI Process)
13. Quality Improvement (QI Process)
14. Decision support for pharmacy and supplies
15. Electronic health record

16. Physician Order Management (POM)
17. Medical Necessity
18. Patient safety and identification (blood and medications)

It's a familiar wish list. While specifics might change slightly from hospital to hospital, the core priorities are very much the same. Hospitals everywhere are interested in moving towards an electronic health record. They're concerned about patient safety. They want to be able to do as much as possible on the Web. And they feel a strong need to establish sound and clearly defined metrics. In fact, there's a great deal of current industry information supporting these initiatives, and JJWild assembled a report and presented it back to the group.

Getting the team up to speed.

Education of the Information Technology Advisory Board is a key element in working through an IT strategic planning process. Because the team represents a cross-section of the organization, the members won't all be up to speed on technical issues; they'll have varying understanding of information systems, and understandably will be most interested in initiatives that impact their particular area. It is important at this stage of the strategic planning process to bring everyone up to a comparable level of understanding. In this particular engagement, JJWild used industry research to assemble educational material for the IT Advisory Board, and also developed a presentation to assist in the indoctrination process.

Reality-check

It's one thing to put together a wish list of priorities. It's another to confront the resource requirements to accomplish it—financial, technological, and human resources. In order to facilitate this necessary “reality-check,” JJWild used various toolsets and supporting interviews to get a clear picture of Johnston Memorial Hospital's expected resource requirements compared to their existing resources and skill sets.

Although a hospital may have identified specific initiatives as important, financial constraints may dictate otherwise. Similarly, especially in many smaller community hospitals, staffing—and staff training—becomes an issue. It is difficult to compete in a marketplace that extends beyond healthcare, and there is an increasing need to educate the IT staff on the latest technology as new software and hardware is implemented.

All those “nice to haves” must be balanced with real life, and a robust planning process takes this into account. If you've done your strategic planning homework, your hospital should be in a position to clearly identify and prioritize your upcoming initiatives—and you'll also have a good idea of the required supporting resources.

Johnston Memorial Hospital has just completed this process and has received full support from their Board to move forward. The IT planning process has also given them a tool to identify impending capital and operating costs, upcoming staffing requirements, and a clear timeline for a reasonable deployment of these initiatives. Teresa Chappell, Director of IT, reflects on the process:

“Sitting in an IT Director's Chair, you get caught up in your day-to-day responsibilities. But, when you get involved with a big project like this, it is a real eye opener. Everything all comes together and it makes it so

much easier to present your findings and recommendations to Senior Management and the Board. Having JJWild come in gives us a great opportunity to make vast improvements that will impact workflow and productivity.”

They are just at the beginning of their journey. But, with a clear vision, and a strategic plan that conforms to their capital, operating, and salary budgets, Johnston Memorial Hospital is solidly positioned for success.

With over 30 years in the healthcare field, Jan Moore currently serves as Director of Consulting Services for JJWild. She has managed multiple MEDITECH implementations, developed healthcare information management strategic plans, provided interim management for multiple healthcare organizations, spearheaded major project management endeavors, and has held many positions, including CIO and Vice President at MEDITECH hospitals. Jan holds an MBA and a Master of Arts in Computer Resources and Information Management from Webster University of Illinois.