

# CASE STUDY



## Paper Reduction

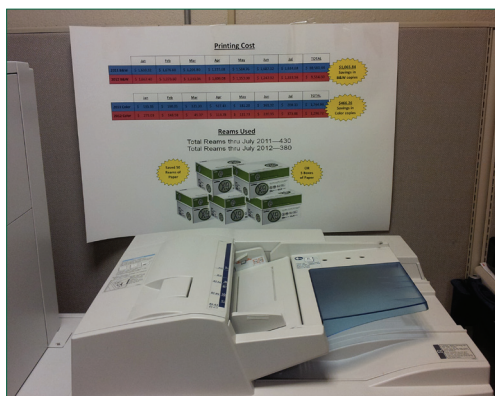
### Demographic Information

- HealthPartners, Minnesota
- 1.4 million medical and dental insurance members
- Six Hospitals
- 1,700 physicians
- Sustainability Lead - Created a position of a Sustainability Program Manager in 2011.

As the largest consumer-governed, nonprofit health care organization in the nation, HealthPartners integrates care, coverage, research and education to improve the health of its members, patients and community. HealthPartners health plan provides access to 700,000 doctors and other care providers for 1.4 million medical and dental insurance members. The Minnesota-based health system also operates six hospitals ranging from 25-bed critical access hospitals to the 454-bed Regions Hospital and employs over 1,700 physicians. With over 20 years of environmental management experience, Dana Slade, MS, CHMM has been the Sustainability Program Manager for HealthPartners since 2011.

### The Problem

To provide health services to its patients and health plan customers in 2011, HealthPartners purchased 195,000 reams of office paper, enough to make 26 stacks as tall as the Empire State Building out of 11,700 trees. Excessive paper use impacts the environment, cost of care, and quality of care. The cost of



### Executive Summary

Functioning as a hospital system and insurance plan, HealthPartners is a complex organization where office paper is used in myriad workflow processes that have to consider government regulations on protected health information documentation. HealthPartners took advantage of health information technology and mechanical strategies to reduce paper use by 17 percent across the organization between 2011 and 2012. The Paper Reduction Team implemented system-wide standard duplex printing, paperless meetings, elimination of automatically printed reports and conducted workflow evaluations. The largest source of paper reduction has been at the Data Center print shop that mails letters and other plan documents to health plan customers. By allowing health plan customers to opt-in for electronic delivery of insurance documents during online registration, the new health plan quickly reduced paper use at the data center by 38 percent.

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purchasing paper may seem small compared to a health system's overall budget, but associated costs inflate the actual cost of paper management 13-31 times more than the upfront cost of procurement. Purchasing and maintaining printers and scanners, postage, employing workers to file and archive paperwork and shredding protected health information are a few ways the costs of managing paper can quickly add up for a healthcare organization.

The transition to electronic health records from paper records is driven by patient safety and healthcare quality. A global comparison of physicians noted that the United States is lagging on the adoption of health information technology (HIT). In addition, HealthPartners members and patients have expressed a preference to reduce the volume of paper documents they receive from HealthPartners. HealthPartners clients have also shown to be supportive of the convenience associated with electronic health records at regular health plan member outreach meetings and patient research sessions.

## Strategy & Implementation

Many institutional barriers make it difficult for healthcare to fully embrace HIT and subsequently enjoy the environmental, cost and quality benefits of becoming more paperless. As both a health care provider and insurance provider, HealthPartners

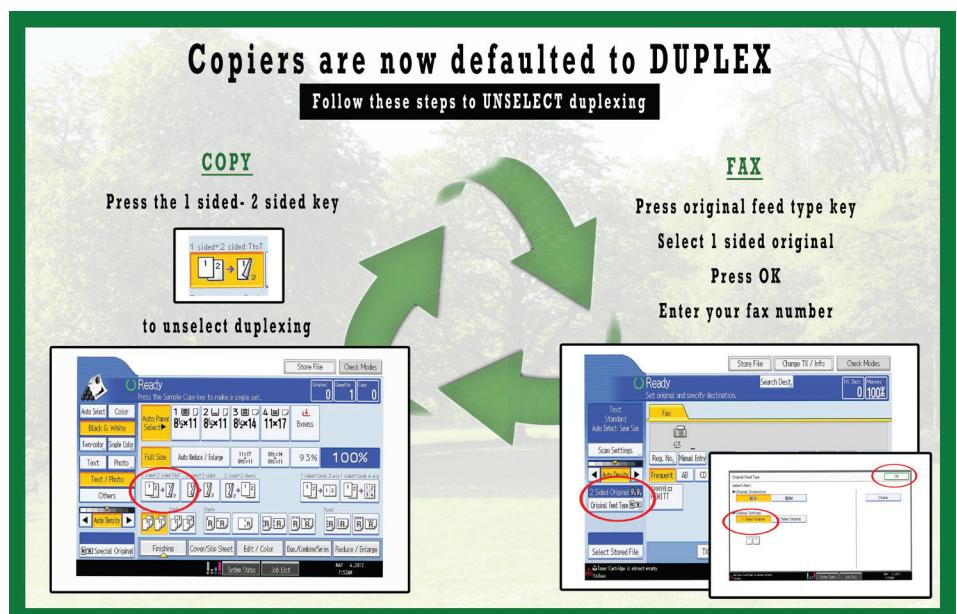
has taken steps to address paper use in both patient care and its insurance business.

In its patient care area, HealthPartners established "Green Teams" across the system to work towards a comprehensive set of sustainability goals. The Paper Reduction Team, a subcommittee of the Green Team, began to track quarterly data on paper use with their main vendor, OfficeMax®, and immediately recognized opportunities for more efficient paper use. With the support of HealthPartners' executive sponsors, the team selected a reasonable goal to reduce paper use by 10 percent by 2012. The executive sponsors felt paper reduction was consistent with the organization's mission to drive down the costs of health care while simultaneously improving the patient's experience and providing enhanced health services.

The Paper Reduction Team has

formal monthly meetings, sends a progress summary to the executive sponsor committee quarterly, and gives a monthly update to the Steering Committee. These lines of communication keep the work team accountable for achieving goals and allows for an exchange of ideas between stakeholders.

For its health plan area, HealthPartners launched a "Go Paperless" team to reduce the amount of paper HealthPartners mails to its insurance members. The average member receives five to ten mailings a year—that many multiplied across 1.4 million members makes for a substantial case to promote electronic delivery. While the team continues to work under state and federal regulations for electronic delivery, the goal is to grow the number of customers who sign up to "Go Paperless." The project team, led by Kimberly Delaney, Senior Manager Regulatory Implementation,



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and HaiVy Thompson, Manager Direct to Consumer Marketing, worked with the legal department to carefully define the terms and conditions of the HealthPartners health plan digital transition, including a backup paper process and recovery system for invalid email addresses. HealthPartners began electronic health plan correspondences with the 2006 launch of the "Secure Web Mailbox."

## Implementation Process

The Paper Reduction Team starts every project with a memo to the department manager describing the project and asking whether the change will negatively affect their work

### HealthPartners Paper Reduction Team

Vini Manchanda, *Senior Director, Supply Chain*

Peg Youngmans, *Director, Corporate facilities*

Gina Hall, *Senior Director, IS&T Services Delivery*

Kris Dudziak, *Senior Manager, Business Operations*

Bob Serreyn, *Manager, Supply Chain*

Kevin Czaplewski, *Administrator, Office Services*

Andrea Rooney, *Senior Administrative Assistant*

Liz Nicklos, *Senior Communications Consultant*

Dana Slade, *Sustainability Program Manager*

process. To make sure a department's work processes are appropriate for the proposed improvements, the team meets with the manager and employees of each department.

The team began with mechanical changes that required very little investment in time or resources such as switching to duplex printing as the default setting. Faxes for multiple patients and older printers are examples of times that duplex printing did not work for a certain department. The team worked to stop unneeded laboratory and anesthesia reports from automatically printing. These reports are now kept electronically. HealthPartners also moved to paperless meetings with televisions or projectors in many meeting areas to reduce the dependence on paper.

Dana Slade, Sustainability Program Manager, challenged the Paper Reduction Team to examine workflow processes for efficiency upgrades. The Paper Reduction Team used data from innovative evaluation tools such as the Rapid Process Assessment (RPA) method to find many process improvements. A third party consultant completed an RPA for Health Information Management departments. Another project identified by the paper reduction team was to increase faxing efficiency in the patient accounting department. Instead of printing electronic faxes, affixing a medical record number, and then scanning it back into the electronic medical record, staff members now have the software ability to electronically attach the

medical record number. In one week, the patient accounting department at one clinic decreased printing from 1,350 sheets to 37 sheets. Each program is piloted over a few months before it is expanded system-wide.

After insurance member adoption of the "Secure Web Mailbox" hit a plateau of 57,000 members, Katie Sayre, Senior Vice President of Health Plan Operations and Government Programs, spearheaded a "Go Paperless" initiative targeted toward all members in 2011. According to Delaney, the main reason for the campaign's success came from building the option to sign up for paperless delivery into online registration. Each new health plan member is automatically presented with a message explaining the electronic document delivery system and an easy process to affirm or decline the feature. The plan member is also able to select the type of documents he or she prefers to have electronically versus on paper. The plan's member services representatives also promote the feature when talking to members and offer to assist members with signing up. By making the sign-up process simple and upfront, HealthPartners health plan allows members to quickly reduce the use of paper.

## Benefits

Over 2011-2012:

1. HealthPartners reduced paper use by 17 percent (down 36,000 reams from 195,000 to 161,000 reams).



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2. The in-house print shop saw the greatest decrease of 38 percent (9,000 reams).
3. Annual paper purchases decreased by \$100,000
4. Paper management savings (printing, filing, shredding, recycling, etc.) are estimated to be a minimum of \$500,000 per year.
5. 260,000 health plan members, nearly 20 percent, receive electronic delivery of health plan documents each year.

## Challenges and Lessons Learned

The Paper Reduction Team initially faced a complex problem with many competing priority groups. A strong, consistent, but flexible approach helped the team unite impacted stakeholder groups. A similar mission applied to all health systems across the country can mean significant savings in cost and environmental impact.

Slade has found that the size of the department did not impact paper reduction program implementation. Rather, each department's internal culture and leadership receptiveness to the changes had the greatest positive effect on meeting paper reduction goals. A strong relationship with their paper provider, OfficeMax®, was integral to data collection for each facility and department at large facilities.

According to Delaney, HealthPartners

health plan will continue to work with regulators to allow more flexibility to deliver insurance plan information online and to promote this capability to drive even greater adoption. The next generation of health consumers who grew up with technology will expect healthcare to be even more digitized. "We are currently in an in-between phase among generations and we expect significant growth in membership wanting electronic documents in the future," says Delaney.

HealthPartners has set another 10 percent reduction goal for 2013 as a part of a two-year sustainability plan. Their data points to maximizing features in software suites as a future area to save thousands of sheets of paper per day.

## Endnotes

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- vi. Schoen, C., Osborn, R., Doty, M., Squires, D., Peugh, J., & Applebaum, S. (2009). A survey of primary care physicians in eleven countries, 2009:

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