

Shands Healthcare, Jacksonville, is in the historic Springfield area of downtown Jacksonville

330 physicians

700-bed, academically affiliated medical center

3,300 employees

28,000 patient visits per year

7 million average lines of transcription per year

Shands Jacksonville is affiliated with the University of Florida Health Science Center in Jacksonville, Florida. It offers the benefits of an academic medical center, including advanced medical treatment and the latest in research in nearly 70 specialty areas. Its mission is “to heal, to comfort and to educate.”

Vincent Johnson, Fellow, American College of Healthcare Executives (FACHE) is the Vice President of Administration for Shands Healthcare. He has been with the organization since 2003 and has executive oversight for nine operational, nursing and ancillary departments consisting of more than 650 employees.



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“We engaged
Spheris as a **partner**
to ensure that we would
have high quality.”

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Forging a partnership.
When Vincent inherited the medical records department at Shands in 2003, he immediately focused on what direction the department would take moving forward. His initial goal was straightforward: get transcription done “better, faster and cost effectively.”

He quickly discovered that while the financial people wanted lower costs, and the doctors wanted “faster,” ultimately “better” was what mattered most. “We engaged Spheris as a partner to ensure that we would have high quality because there had been all kinds of challenges around quality in the past,” he said.

Finding efficiencies.

Vincent initiated his relationship with Spheris by arranging a meeting that included Shands’ chief of staff, medical director, Health Information Management director and Spheris’ chief executive officer, Steven E. Simpson. “I knew that we had a partner after that meeting because our needs were clearly identified and they were addressed,” he said.

This partnership was important to Vincent. He explained, “We wanted to enter into a longer term, more stable environment to look at ways in which we could reduce some of our costs. We’ve been very successful in trying to accomplish all of those things.”

What distinguished Spheris for Shands was its ability to ensure better quality reports while identifying inefficiencies and finding ways to deliver improvements. His goal was to work with all of the clinical documentation providers and upgrade equipment and processes as needed to achieve a higher quality of service.

Creating balance in the relationship.

At the start of the Spheris relationship, Shands was calling all the shots. The hospital was telling Spheris what they needed, how they needed it and what their expectations were. “It was a one-way street,” Vincent said.

As time went on, Shands discovered that Spheris was able to play a different role. Spheris representatives shared systems and strategies that had been successfully deployed at other hospitals. They introduced ideas such as overseas transcription, handheld technology and other services that promised increased efficiencies. According to Vincent, *“Now, there’s more of a sharing, more of a showing on the part of the vendor that allows us to leverage new technologies and innovations coming down the pike.”* He appreciates this give-and-take because it fits with Shands’ approach to adopting new technologies and services.

“The culture here is to look at a lot of different things and then make the best decision. Sometimes the best decision is waiting and figuring out where to go next,” Vincent said. He finds that Spheris understands how he operates and works at his pace to implement new capabilities.

Not just line rates – getting the big picture.

While quality is critical at Shands, competitive line rates are also important. At one point, Vincent compared his Spheris rates with that of another hospital and learned he was paying more. He contacted Spheris and questioned the difference. The response he got was, “You’ve been down that road where you pay a penny less, but at the end of the day, the doctors are ready to tar and feather you, and the medical executive committee is mad because there are so many errors. And your turnaround times aren’t right.” For Vincent and Shands, quality and turnaround were more important than saving a penny or two on line rates. *“That’s the difference between a partnership and working with a vendor who’s just trying to squeeze every dollar out of you,”* he said.

Trying global solutions.

In an effort to help Shands continue improving turnaround times while keeping costs in line, Spheris suggested its global option. Vincent was initially hesitant because he was concerned about taking away local jobs. However, Spheris gradually migrated Shands to its Follow the SunSM solution and created a blended approach that was able to address Shands’ needs. Because the transcriptionists in the global network are Spheris employees, the quality of work is consistent regardless of whether it is done domestically or in one of two locations in India. Spheris’ strict policies, protocols and verification procedures ensure the utmost standards of accuracy and security, which helps give Shands’ management peace of mind.

Today, approximately 30-40 percent of Shands’ work is transcribed internationally. The results are consistent turnaround times, financial savings and sustained quality.

Measuring up.

For Vincent Johnson, the most telling evaluation of Shands’ clinical documentation service is silence. *“If I can go to my medical executive committee meeting and not hear complaints from doctors, I know it’s okay. From a quality standpoint, from a turnaround standpoint, we’re doing what we’re supposed to do,”* he said. As it relates to physician feedback, “no news is good news,” said Vincent.

With quality under control, industry trends are also used as a metric. Vincent’s ongoing dialog with Spheris keeps him current on line rates, new technologies and other factors that help ensure that the hospital’s transcription service is meeting its needs. By taking a very proactive approach

and regularly challenging Spheris to advise him of industry trends, Vincent feels he is getting the value, service and line rate he expects.

Expanding dictation to improve efficiency.

Based on their ongoing satisfaction with Spheris' clinical documentation, Shands Healthcare began having their physicians dictate Histories and Physicals (H&Ps). "We knew that was going to cost us more money. But we did it to improve the quality and also streamline the process," he said. The results have been positive. H&P information gets into the system faster and is more accessible to healthcare professionals. "It was a conscious decision and we're happy with it," said Vincent.

Growth? "Bring it on."

In a growing state like Florida, healthcare needs are steadily increasing. As Shands Healthcare grows to accommodate these needs, Vincent must be certain that his provider can handle greater dictation requirements. In his view, "If I were to tell Spheris tomorrow, 'I want to increase by 3 million lines,' they would say, 'bring it on.'" As a result, he's comfortable that Spheris can handle his growth needs. He simply doesn't worry about maxing out the system.

Advice for colleagues.

For Shands Healthcare, choosing a transcription service boiled down to finding a provider who would satisfy the physicians. Vincent advises other healthcare companies looking to make this decision to weigh prospective providers on their commitment to quality. As he describes it, "We provide a service for our customers who are the doctors. We've got to listen to them about what kind of product they want." He suggests that HIM directors get input from their doctors directly to learn what experiences

they've had with providers and find out what shortfalls they encountered and, ultimately, know what they care about. Making a decision for Vincent meant finding a service that gave him confidence in his provider's ability to satisfy physicians.

Shands recently had an opportunity to prove out this approach. One department, Neurology, was using a local provider for transcription with less than ideal results. Based on its success with Spheris, the neurology department decided to fully outsource to Spheris. The transition went smoothly and since Neurology's move, Vincent reported that he hasn't heard a thing.

Part two, in his opinion, is making sure you have a good working partnership with your provider. "I know exactly who I need to go to in order to get my needs met. I think that's what makes it different. It's really simple – it's about relationships," said Vincent.

Spheris serves more than 500 health systems, hospitals and group practices throughout the U.S. Like Shands Healthcare, each has its own unique needs and story. Spheris works in partnership with each organization to provide complete solutions that blend technology with workflow management, a global network of transcriptionists and metrics-driven service. All to streamline the flow of critical information and enhance patient care.

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