UHealth Information Technology Team Hailed for Enterprise Excellence

The University of Miami Health System’s IT Team worked diligently to automate its entire COVID-19 vaccination process to ensure that the inoculations could be administered swiftly and safely. That work is being recognized as one of the most resourceful IT projects in the nation with a CIO 100 Award.

For the first time in the history of health care technology, the nation is relying on electronic medical recordkeeping in unprecedented ways, especially to track COVID-19 vaccines. In lieu of a federal system for tracking vaccinations, UHealth Information Technology (UHealth IT) took quick action as news of possible vaccine distribution circulated in late November 2020. To ensure that all aspects of vaccine management—allocation, distribution, monitoring, and reporting—could be administered responsibly, without overwhelming scheduling platforms or disrupting patient care, the team, consisting of about 35 IT analysts, worked tirelessly to automate the entire vaccination process. Their project, “Population Outreach and Automation for COVID-19,” is now being recognized as one of the most innovative IT projects in the nation by the CIO 100 Awards.

Developing a solution in record time.

As the holidays approached, and COVID-19 took its toll on some members of the UHealth IT team, their focus remained clear.
“The goal was to get people vaccinated without human intervention,” said Maritza Suarez, M.D., chief medical informatics officer. “We knew we needed to leverage our electronic medical record to manage high volume vaccinations without impacting the care we provide to our patients.” The current data, scheduling, and tracking systems would need to be revised in order to ensure that every vaccination received by the health system could be administered to eligible patients, employees, and community members.

With limited time, ever-changing state guidelines, and different vaccine protocols, the system would need to be nimble in the way it combed through 3.48 million patient data records, and adaptable as the team would likely be distributing vaccinations outside of traditional clinical settings. To accomplish its goal, the team worked around the clock—often seven days a week and during the holiday celebrations in late December and early January—to deliver a seamless solution in record time.

“Electronic Medical Records (EMRs) assist with excellent delivery of care and help to leverage solutions, but it was the expertise and dedication of UHealth IT that brought this project to life,” said David Reis, Ph.D., chief information officer for the University of Miami Health System. “The COVID-19 vaccination initiative validated that we have the right tools in place, but we wouldn’t have successfully accomplished this without our team working diligently and collaboratively behind the scenes.”

Creating a clear vision.

Unlike typical scheduling systems for patients, the COVID-19 vaccination process required a keen eye on all aspects of how
the health system interacts with the community. While taking into consideration available resources, uncertainty of vaccine distribution and type, and the eagerness to support the community safely and effectively, UHealth IT was forced to reexamine what had worked in the past and shift its focus to the needs of the future.

“The path for us was so clear—seeing what was happening at other health system around the country—we really knew there was a right way to do this,” said Reis. “We had to be incredibly humble, learn from others’ mistakes in real time, sift through it, and come back to build this solution.”

While planning for this process, the UHealth IT considered both sides of the digital divide and built a custom scheduling interface for the team managing the call center. As part of the automated system, eligible vaccine recipients have the option of scheduling their vaccine appointment electronically through their MyUHealthChart portal or by calling the scheduling center.

What’s next.

The University of Miami Health System IT team will be honored in August during the annual awards ceremony and conference hosted online by CIO, an online publication that provides its readers with key insights on career development, including certifications, hiring practices, and skills development.

“This award allows us to showcase the strongholds we have at UHealth IT,” noted Dr. Suarez. “It’s the first time our team has received national recognition for innovation while competing with other areas of technology, outside of healthcare, that are doing incredible work.” Currently, the
team has begun focusing its energy on the next project—developing a digital vaccine cards.

Stay up to date on University of Miami COVID-19 information at coronavirus.miami.edu, including the latest messages sent to the University community.

Content Type article