Insight Driven Health

Walgreens: A Connected Health platform for the transforming health industry

Client profile

As the largest drugstore chain in the United States, Walgreens (www.walgreens.com) has a vision of being the first choice in health and daily living for individuals. The company provides convenient, multichannel access to consumer goods and services and trusted, cost-effective pharmacy, health and wellness services and advice to more than 6 million customers daily in communities across America. Walgreens operates more than 8,200 drugstores in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Business challenge

Walgreens aspires to transform the traditional drugstore into a health and daily living destination that offers a range of products and services to help customers get, stay and live well. The company complements its drugstores with health clinics and a growing specialty pharmacy business. Walgreens operates more than 700 health and wellness clinics in its stores and on employer worksites. Its health centers on or near employer campuses offer diverse services including primary and acute care; wellness, pharmacy and disease management services; and health and fitness programming.

Walgreens is evolving its businesses amidst a major transformation of the US healthcare industry driven by the Affordable Care Act. This transformation is blurring the boundaries of the traditional US health delivery landscape. Emerging is a new ecosystem of participants consisting of providers, payers, healthcare partners, public health institutions, laboratories and pharmaceutical retailers and manufacturers. In this new landscape, Walgreens—and its competitors—are fiercely pursuing the development of health system partnerships and connected health capabilities to become the first movers in new provider spaces, such as retail clinics.
To provide the services needed to connect Walgreens to the healthcare ecosystem enabling health information exchange and enhanced communications, the company recognizes the importance of having the necessary information technology (IT) infrastructure and strategy in place. However, business growth and new acquisitions in recent years have made the company’s IT infrastructure more complex. Without a centralized and consistent approach to external connectivity, Walgreens projected that the number of connections and ways to connect would become unmanageable.

To help Walgreens address this issue and assist the company in designing and developing a manageable and scalable solution, Walgreens turned to Accenture for its extensive experience in connected health and solution delivery. These services included drawing on a team from Accenture’s Connected Health Services practice that was supplemented by an offshore delivery capability team based at the Accenture Connected Health Center of Excellence in Bangalore, India. Additionally, the team was further supported by Accenture’s global team of Connected Health leaders. These leaders provided in-depth knowledge on infrastructure technologies and capabilities in the healthcare space leveraging implementation experiences globally, including Singapore, Australia and Canada.

How Accenture helped

The focus of Walgreens’ Connected Health strategy was to enhance the existing infrastructure to accommodate storage of clinical information, as well as to simplify the complexity of the existing IT architecture. This focus would require Walgreens to move to a standard, scalable single-point gateway structure to connect to internal and external stakeholders. Doing so would enable Walgreens to have single points of contact and simplified ways to support and operationalize connection points as the company builds out its data-sharing capabilities—and ultimately help Walgreens strengthen its position as a trusted member of the healthcare ecosystem.

Accenture’s Connected Health team collaborated closely with Walgreens’ resources to develop a plan, and subsequently design and develop a foundational architecture and the core capabilities needed to enable clinical data sharing. The team interviewed Walgreens’ leaders, business owners and others to understand how a connected health environment could improve their business services or create new opportunities. The input confirmed that connected health capabilities are paramount, that bi-directional data flow is critical and that capabilities must be scalable.

The team also performed a gap assessment of Walgreens’ existing operational architecture and identified a number of key areas needing focus in order to meet the requirements of evolving healthcare industry trends. In collaboration with Walgreens, Accenture then provided a buy-versus-build analysis that ultimately helped Walgreens to adopt a best-of-breed solution, leveraging the company’s existing middleware suite.

To support the solution, Walgreens introduced components of Oracle’s Healthcare Solutions providing a foundation for the overall integration and an established clinical data repository inclusive of a standards-compliant health record locator. Also included was a dynamic policy infrastructure that integrates privacy and security management into a single solution. This solution is further supported by components of the Oracle Access Management Suite and Oracle Entitlement Server and Results Viewer—a clinician-centric application for secure access to a full spectrum of patient data with Direct Secure Messaging capabilities.

The Walgreens and Accenture teams worked closely to support cross-team alignment between Walgreens IT departments, Oracle and Orion Health delivery teams, as well as Accenture’s design and development teams, to stand up the foundational components and capabilities. As an extension of the foundational architecture, Accenture helped Walgreens to establish a data sharing pilot between Walgreens’ clinics and the Surescripts provider network.

Through this collaboration with Surescripts, Walgreens is able to electronically deliver customer visit summaries with Surescripts’ providers real time via electronic transmission, faxing and mail supporting clinical interoperability—a critical step toward accelerating the digital transformation of the nation’s healthcare system. Clinical interoperability plays a central role toward improving continuity of care, supporting the “meaningful use” of electronic health records, and advancing the patient-centered medical home model of care.

In addition to implementing the new solution and platform, Walgreens sought to establish an onboarding and deployment strategy to ensure efficient and effective adoption. Leveraging Accenture’s successfully demonstrated methodologies and experienced business architects and technical consultants, Walgreens developed a set of assets and tools to help prioritize stakeholder engagement and connectivity initiatives by confirming use cases, assessing value opportunities and conducting feasibility assessments. Repeatable processes and workflows were also established to streamline the onboarding process while navigating aspects of implementation/integration, data governance, legal/compliance, data governance and change management. As Walgreens continues its journey toward becoming more connected in the health ecosystem, next phases of deployment are to build connections to strategic health systems, delivery networks and stand-alone institutions.
High performance delivered

With Accenture’s guidance, Walgreens has progressed on its journey with building out the foundational infrastructure needed to help enable the company’s business units to securely connect to the health ecosystem, navigate industry standards and expand healthcare services. Walgreens’ infrastructure is designed to help facilitate connections to providers, payers, government, labs and health information exchanges as well as provide the transport and delivery of such functionality as clinical messaging for areas such as medication adherence and health testing, e-referrals, e-consultations, lab orders and results delivery, and electronic distribution of visit summaries. The foundational infrastructure already enables Walgreens to share clinical data with external stakeholders, helping it to become a participant in existing care models.

The benefits Walgreens has realized include:

**IT benefits:**
- Enterprise-wide gateway utilization
- Standard methodologies for connecting
- Consistent data formats for ease with implementation/integration

**Business benefits:**
- Simplified implementations
- Minimized support/service variations
- Ability to participate effectively with new care models (Patient Centered Medical Home, Accountable Care Organization)
- Deepened partner relationships due to quality reporting and outcomes
- Increased patient loyalty due to convenience and speed

Walgreens continues to build out its connected health architecture with the aim to significantly streamline the time and effort required for external connections and to establish a platform for future growth and scalability. As the architecture is fully realized, Walgreens plans to continue to engage with new stakeholders. Strong external stakeholder connectivity and data sharing holds the potential to fuel a transition to Walgreens’ creation of the leading healthcare platform in the evolving patient-centered healthcare ecosystem—ultimately improving patient care and satisfaction through coordinated care delivery.
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