Nicklaus Children's Hospital | Pediatric Virtual Care

Increasing Access to Care via Telehealth for NICU's across Florida

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Background

As of May of 2023, Florida Agency for Healthcare Administration regulations mandated stricter pediatric subspecialty coverage for neonatal intensive care units (NICUs).

Nicklaus Children's Hospital launched a Virtual Care NICU Program to extend specialty care coverage to hospitals in South Florida via Telehealth.

Purpose

- The virtual care program enables telehealth consultations from Board-certified Pediatric Endocrinology, Gastroenterology, Genetics, Hematology/Oncology, Infectious Diseases, Nephrology, Neurology, Otolaryngology, Pulmonology, Urology, and Cardiology physicians.
- Through virtual peer to peer consultations, physicians share their expert opinion and provide guidance, reducing geographic barriers to care.

Objectives

- Enhance access to specialized pediatric care and address shortage of subspecialists in underserved or under-resourced communities, with a lens on health equity.
- Optimize communication and workflow efficiency within the NICU Telehealth Consultation Program.
- Improve operational performance and ensure financial sustainability.

Keys to Success

EARLY INTERVENTION • CONVENIENCE • EXTEND GEOGRAPHIC REACH OF PROVIDERS • CONTINUITY OF CARE • REDUCE COST • QUALITY OUTCOMES

IMPROVED ACCESS TO CARE

Planning / Research Methods

The methodology for this process improvement project involved the following planning and research methods:
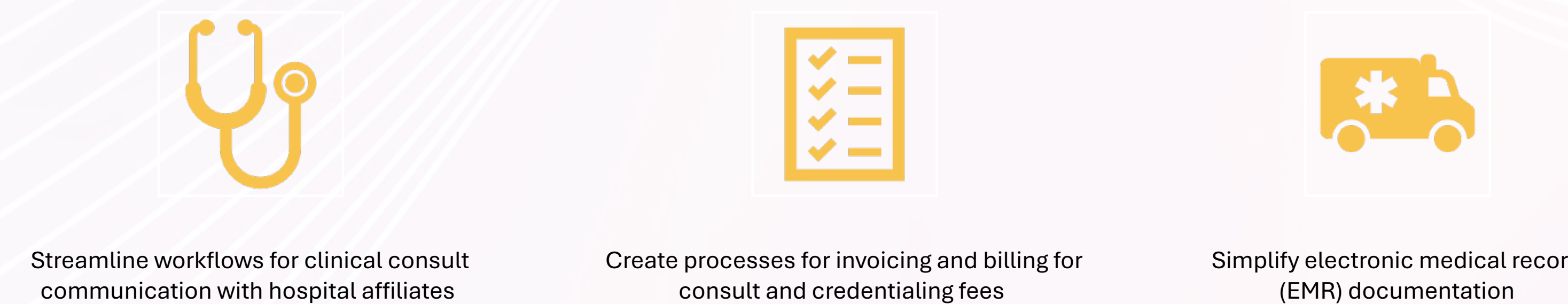
- In-depth interviews with key physicians and affiliate hospitals to gain insights into clinical operations.
- Leveraged Lean Six Sigma tools, including:
  - Value Stream Mapping to visualize processes
  - Root Cause Analysis to identify underlying issues
  - Statistical Process Control to analyze reported volume data and assess consult variances across the program's historical period
- Data-driven evaluation and targeted process improvement. Patterns were identified concerning best practice utilization and specialty requests.
- Comprehensive financial analysis to evaluate the program's overall financial performance.
- Review of patient tracking methodology between facilities to ensure a continuum of care despite different medical record numbers.
- Identify critical areas for improvement in the NICU Telehealth Consultation Program, focusing on enhancing quality for physician group practice, physicians, affiliate hospitals, and patient/families.

NICU Telehealth Consultation Workflow

Physician receives consult request via Clarus Call Management. → Physician completes consult via phone or telehealth using affiliate hospital's virtual care platform. → Physician documents in 1 of 8 affiliate hospital EHRs. → Physician group staff support with invoice and billing process.

Areas of Focus

These changes enable evidence-based decisions to optimize clinical workflows and increase efficiency:

- Streamline workflows for clinical consult communication with hospital affiliates
- Create processes for invoicing and billing for consult and credentialing fees
- Simplify electronic medical record (EMR) documentation

Actions Taken

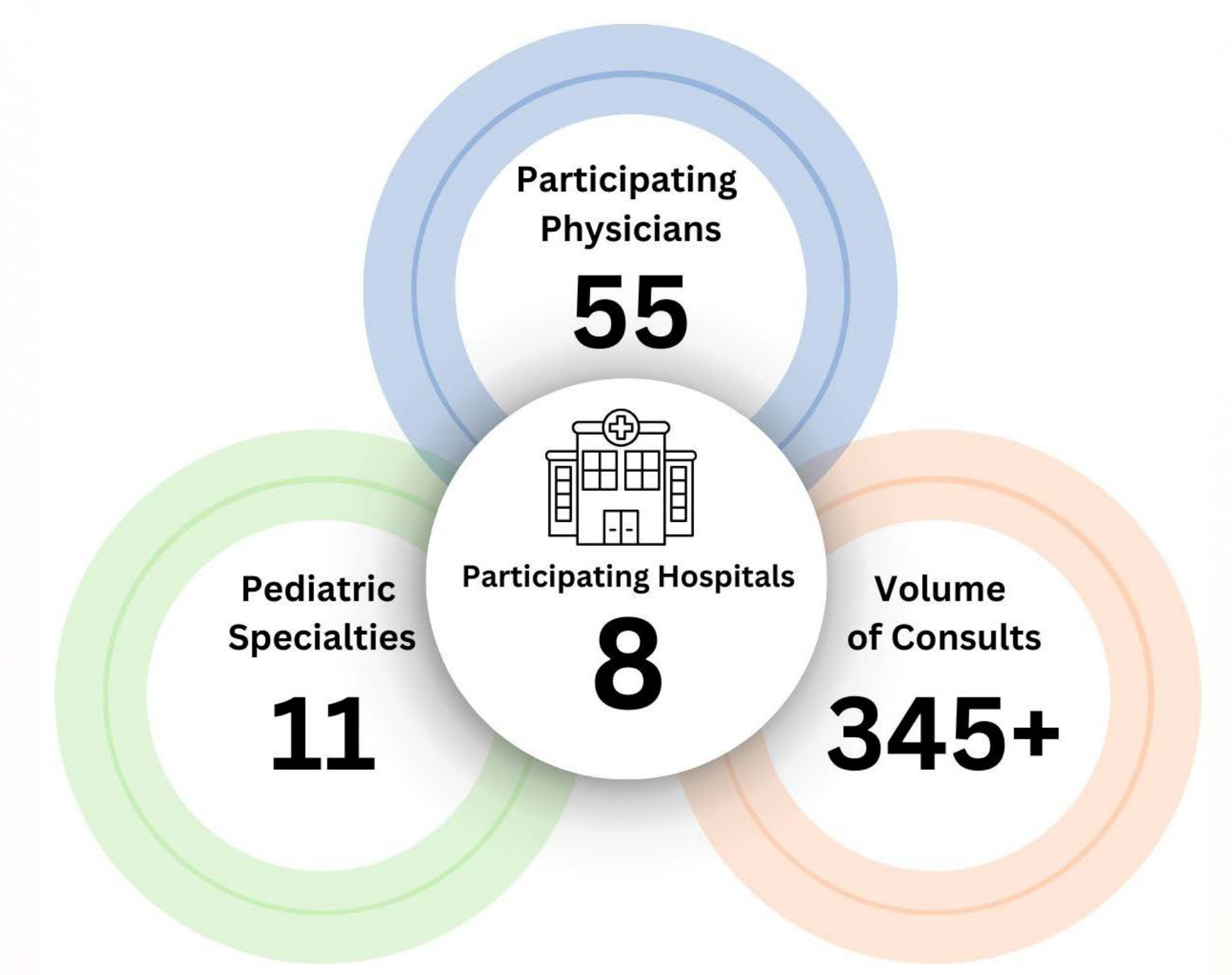|	
Optimize Clinical Consult Communication & Workflow:	Streamline workflows for clinical consult communication with hospital affiliates. Implement reliable communication tools to enhance effectiveness and efficiency. Launch a communication platform to receive consult requests.
Electronic Health Record (EHR) Integration:	Support seamless access to 8 affiliate EHRs. Ensure physicians have quick access to critical patient data (labs, scans, medical history).
Billing & Credentialing Processes:	Create streamlined invoicing and billing processes for consult and credentialing fees. Optimize and streamline physician privileges and general process workflows.
Post-Discharge & Referral Coordination:	Enhance referral coordination for neonatal care continuity post-discharge.

Results

Key results included:

- 55 credentialed participating physicians with an average of 17 consultations per month among our 8 affiliate hospitals.
- 345+ consultations to babies in NICUs across Florida (May 2023-November 2024), increasing access to specialized pediatric care.
- 24-hour response time for consultations.

- The program resulted in potential travel savings of 23,704 miles and 1,117 hours in avoided physician travel.
- Established an invoice process for program-related fees, recovering over $100,000. Recovered funds are reinvested in clinical staff, program growth, and additional improvements to paging platform.
- Decreased administrative burden on both clinical and administrative teams, with 50% reduction in administrative-related escalations.

Savings & Distance Tool

23,704 miles saved

1,117 hours saved in physician travel

$100,000 costs recovered in program related fees

Participating Physicians **55**

Participating Hospitals **8**

Pediatric Specialties **11**

Volume of Consults **345+**

Lessons Learned

Physician Engagement:

- Provide education on telehealth benefits and best practices.
- Ensure seamless integration with existing workflows.
- Foster a culture of digital health adoption through training and support.
- Encourage feedback and continuous improvement.
- Streamline EHR access as it is still needed for pertinent patient information to be referenced by consulting physicians.

Partner Hospital Clinical and Operational Leadership Engagement:

- Align telehealth initiatives with hospital goals and patient care strategies.
- Establish clear communication channels between virtual care teams and hospital leadership.
- Provide operational support for scheduling, technology, and patient access.
- Monitor performance metrics and outcomes to demonstrate program value.

Collaborator Acknowledgement

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