

Strengthening the cardiac care referral network

How the VitalEngine™* healthcare platform improved access and collaboration in Alabama and beyond



The status quo falls short

Providing widespread access to quality cardiac care depends on having an efficient, effective way to manage referrals. Unfortunately, in many healthcare facilities, this poses a great challenge.

The problem is that EMR systems, while excellent tools for managing many aspects of care, are not designed to facilitate referrals between health systems. As a result, much of the referral process continues to be largely manual and inefficient for both referring and accepting practices.

For referring practices, ensuring complete, HIPAA-compliant transfer of notes and images—often between EMR systems that are isolated (or non-existent)—is frustrating and time-consuming. For office staff, manually organizing referral packets,

followed by making repeated phone calls to verify that important documentation has safely arrived at its destination is inefficient. Over-reliance on antiquated data transfer methods like CDs and faxes can result in low image quality or lost files, necessitating duplicate work.

For patients, following up on a referral for a specialty procedure may involve taking on the responsibility of bringing their own images to their appointment.

Healthcare providers deal with the constant risk that missing images and tests will need to be repeated, further delaying care, increasing costs, and frustrating patients.

Expansion of VitalEngine in Alabama

10x

increase in platform adoption over 5 years



7

Networks statewide

670

Physicians

>1,956

Healthcare professionals

A better solution in Alabama

To help address these issues, healthcare systems nationwide are turning to the VitalEngine healthcare collaboration platform.

Alabama is a case in point. In Alabama and surrounding states, using VitalEngine over the last five years has helped enable efficient referrals and expand access to quality care at leading cardiac facilities around the state.

By improving communication among providers, and creating a smoother referral process, VitalEngine allows cardiologists and staff to expand their practices and—most importantly—focus on serving patients. This has led to improved patient experience and increased patient throughput, all throughout the network, delivered through a platform that staff and doctors describe as simple to learn and use.

Improving communication improves outcomes

Physicians recognize that collaboration among care team members leads to the best outcomes for their patients. As Dr. Darryl Prime, a cardiologist in rural Alabama put it, “The better you communicate, the better patients do.”

VitalEngine’s communication tools have helped Dr. Prime collaborate with accepting specialists to determine whether they can treat his patients, sometimes even before he sends the patients an hour away to Birmingham.

“The better you communicate, the better patients do.”

“VitalEngine-facilitated communication has helped ensure patients received the best medical treatment for their condition.”

Darryl Prime, M.D.
Cardiologist

VitalEngine’s Vchat feature provides a HIPAA-compliant means for the heart care team to communicate with one another at their convenience, within and outside the institution. “VitalEngine is an amazing tool in terms of the collaboration it allows,” said cardiothoracic surgeon Kyle Eudailey, M.D., a frequent accepting specialist at one of Alabama’s most-recognized tertiary hospitals, the University of Alabama Birmingham (UAB) Structural Heart and Valve Clinic. “Collaboration is the gold standard moving forward. In cardiac surgery and interventional cardiology, this concept of the heart team approach is not going anywhere, and it’s very important, especially when you get into complex cardiac care.”

Dr. Prime points out that VitalEngine has helped improve his trust in his network because efficient communication means he has more information on the procedures they have performed, and he can easily track the patient outcomes that followed.

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Kyle Eudailey, M.D.
Cardiothoracic Surgeon

Increase efficiency, decrease errors

For both referring and accepting practices, manual referrals inevitably lead to errors and wasted time, regardless of how careful staff may be. VitalEngine reduces errors and time spent correcting them.

At one central Alabama clinic, located 90-minutes’ drive from Birmingham, a staff member estimated that prior to implementing VitalEngine, referral records were lost during the manual transfer process up to 20% of the time. Today less time is spent making phone calls to confirm that accepting hospitals received their referrals,

because of recipients getting the information in minutes and confirming via Vchat. There is no need for printing and shredding of records—an important advantage for smaller practices where staff wear multiple hats. At the accepting end, Laura Raye Byrd, Operations Manager at UAB Structural Heart and Valve Clinic, reports that VitalEngine saves them time on the phone seeking

Before VitalEngine utilization, records were lost during the manual transfer process for

1-in-5
referrals

20%

missing records. She adds, they are also spending less time rescheduling patient appointments due to delayed or incomplete referral packets. If a document or image is overlooked during the initial sending process, the issue is now solved more quickly through a VitalEngine secure electronic transfer.

Better patient care and experience

The inefficiencies of the referring process can take a toll on patients’ experience. Accepting physicians appreciate that VitalEngine allows them to cut down on repeated imaging and review patient records prior to appointments. Dr. Eudailey says, “We get all this information sooner. We are able to make some decisions, like what we need in terms of additional imaging, before we even sit down with somebody. That makes it all easier on the patient. You’ve seen everything, you’ve reviewed it all, you’ve had a discussion with the appropriate people.” That adds up to patients who feel more comfortable and confident in their care. They appreciate that their doctor has seen their history and is able to collaborate with their cardiologist back home.

Collaboration, efficiency, and access across the spectrum of care



E-Consults

Chart and/or image review and consultation without patient presence



Medical image tools



Workflow tool

Numerous internal workflows to fill in the EMR gaps



Telemedicine

Remote visit with patient involvement



Referrals

Digital referrals for clinic visit



Vchat and channels

Informal discussion between HCPs

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Kyle Eudailey, M.D.
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Ms. Byrd noted that VitalEngine helps improve the patient experience not only before a procedure, but also during the follow-up phase. Referring physicians in patients' communities are able to quickly see reports and images from a procedure. This smooth transition gives patients confidence that their hometown doctor has all their information, and that they will be getting the best ongoing care.

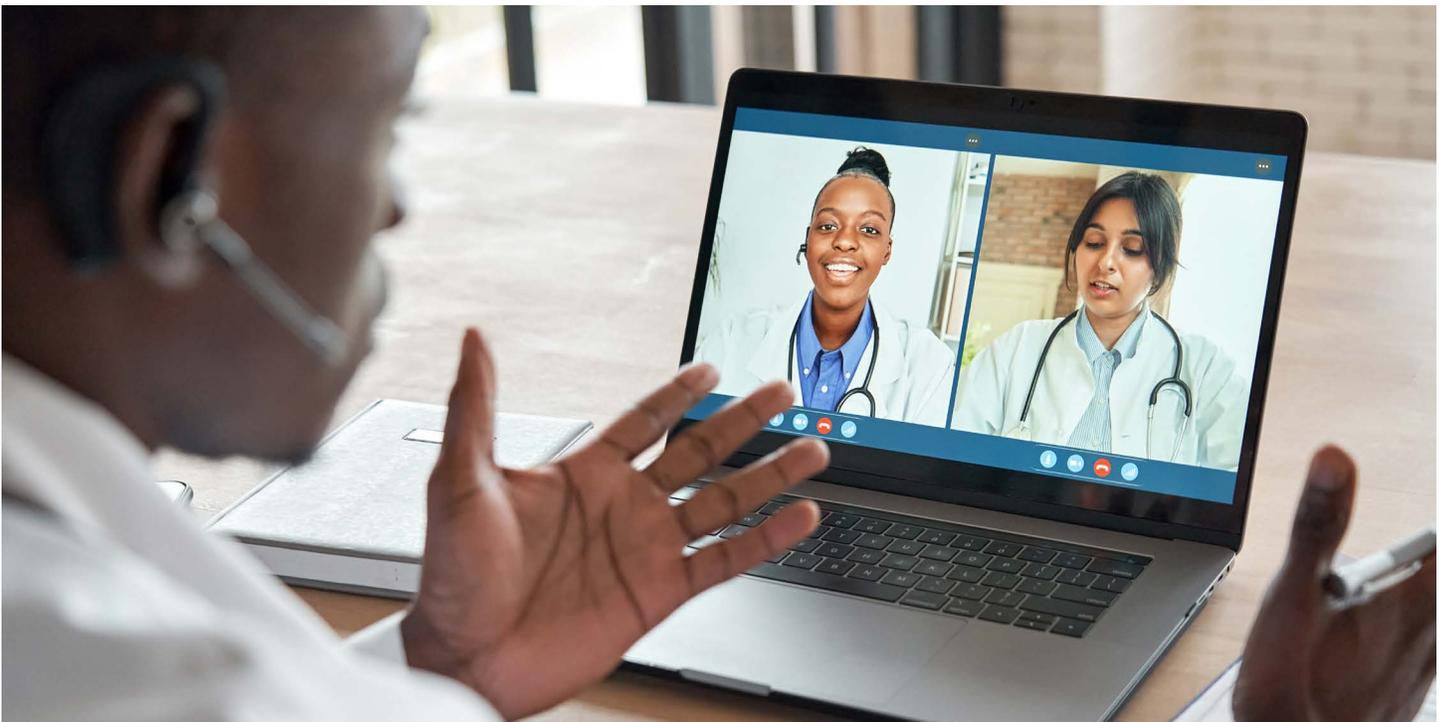
A platform that's easy to learn and use across devices

Asked if staff had challenges adopting the VitalEngine platform, Ms. Byrd described the process of learning to create and send referrals as "very, very simple." Most

users are able to grasp the process after a one-time walk-through. Because team members can have different device preferences, the platform is optimized for mobile devices, as well as desktop and laptop computers.

Collaborating for better care

Across Alabama and nearby states, implementing VitalEngine has led to more efficiency, better patient experience, and improved communication among cardiology care providers—all via software that is easy to use with minimal training. Private practices, rural clinics, and accepting tertiary hospitals are seeing these benefits more each day, as additional providers and staff adopt the platform.



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