Interview series

Complying with the CMS mandate: An apples-to-apples bridge between healthcare data formats

Edifecs, the leader in healthcare interoperability, helps customers comply with new mandates and unleash the power of secure, reliable electronic health data exchange.

GuideWell is improving the cost, quality, and access of health care for its customers by applying broad industry experience to reimagine and reshape the future of health. In this spirit, GuideWell collaborates with, supports, and creates health companies with a broad range of health-related products and services that are integral and useful to people's everyday lives.

Let's get solving.

Edifacs, GuideWell, and Google Cloud are solving...

"...one of the most complex interoperability problems in modern healthcare IT."

Maxim Abramsky, Senior Director of Product Management, Edifecs

"...for nationwide healthcare interoperability problems, with the goals of improving patient care and making interoperability more cost-efficient."

Amit Shah, Director, GuideWell

The Google Cloud Healthcare and Life Sciences team spoke with Maxim Abramsky, Senior Director of Product Management at Edifecs, and Amit Shah, director at GuideWell, about building an on-premises FHIR system to help healthcare organizations comply with the recent Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) mandate.

Maxim Abramsky,
Senior Director of
Product Management,
Edifecs

Edifecs delivers cloud-based solutions for healthcare and life science organizations. What have you been doing to help your customers get ready for the CMS mandate?

Maxim Abramsky: The recently finalized CMS mandate requires all health plans that do business with Medicare and Medicaid to make patient data accessible via secure application programming interfaces (APIs). Our primary focus is to implement a scalable and easily deployable FHIR interoperability solution.

The conventional FHIR solution requires physical hardware and a long procurement cycle. We can provide a superior solution within a matter of days, and we automatically scale up and scale down as the volume of data increases and decreases.

How has partnering with Google Cloud helped?

Maxim Abramsky: The excellent synergy between our products and Google Cloud's offerings has helped us deliver for our customers. Working with Google Cloud has been easy and fun because all of the Google employees, from engineers to executive managers, know the domain very well. We didn't have to spend a lot of time explaining what we needed to do. In turn, the technology Google Cloud provided allowed us to implement the solution quickly and efficiently. We haven't had to implement any hacks or work-arounds. Everything worked smoothly and as we expected.

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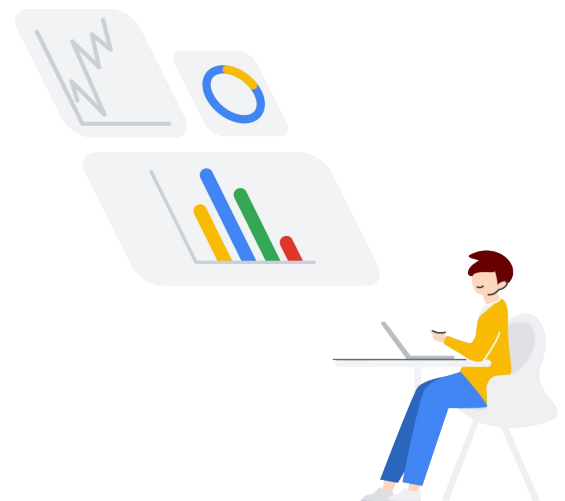
That definitely sounds like a successful partnership. Can you share an example of a customer who adopted this solution?

Maxim Abramsky: With GuideWell, we implemented an on-premises version of the solution to facilitate FHIR interoperability. The main business challenge was implementing something called Blue Button 2.0, which is part of the CMS mandate. We first had to take the existing terabytes of data—which include clinical data, financial data, and other forms of data related to a patient or a member of the health plan—and convert them into the FHIR format efficiently. Once the data was migrated, we then needed to store it in the FHIR repository, which needs to be scalable and flexible—that is, if the amount of data increases, it shouldn't just choke. Finally, we had to enable access to data stored in the FHIR repository for health plan members.

To address these challenges, we had Edifecs software do the data transformation and orchestration. We converted the existing HL7 and HIPAA data into FHIR, then cleaned it up to remove duplicates and so forth. We moved the data into the on-premises FHIR repository and enabled API access using Edifecs software.

That's fantastic. Turning now to Amit, I'd love to learn about this collaboration from GuideWell's perspective. What specific business challenge were you facing, and how did Edifecs help you solve this problem in an innovative way?

Amit Shah: Guidewell is one of the leading healthcare companies in the state of Florida. We have a lot of different health solutions, as well as insurance businesses. We needed help making the shift toward utilizing a FHIR-based API for real-time, bidirectional exchange of data between our provider offices, our clinics, and us, so we could give our members better care during their visits with a provider.

Some providers' electronic medical record (EMR) systems are starting to leverage the FHIR APIs. But other EMR systems have a longer maturity curve, if you will. In order for us to scale up—because we have over 40,000 providers in our network—we needed a solution that allowed us to easily interact with end providers, regardless of which system they used.

We'd already been leveraging Edifecs for electronic data interchange (EDI) transactions—the existing transactions that provider offices use today for eligibility claims, authorizations, and other processes. The FHIR module acts as a bridge. Even if a provider isn't using FHIR, the bridge helps convert the data into a consistent file format. Using the bridge means we don't have to build siloed solutions to manage data exchange with our different providers.

So the Edifecs solution simplifies the data that's coming in by converting it all into the same format—apples to apples, if you will?

Amit Shah: Exactly. Internally, we only have to worry about FHIR-based transactions, instead of all the other types of APIs. And the bridge transforms any transactions that we send in FHIR back into the format the system on the other end expects. It also helps convert an EDI transaction into FHIR and vice versa. So, it makes our lives much easier when it comes to interacting with providers' offices.

Maxim, once you completed the GuideWell solution, what came next?

Maxim Abramsky: Our next goal was to replicate and create the analog solution in the cloud so that we could easily redeploy the solution for different customers. If somebody were to come to us saying, "Hey, we need the same solution, but we need it tomorrow," we wanted to be able to make that happen. We were able to achieve that goal with Google Cloud.

GuideWell showed us the real amount of data they had, so we weren't operating with abstract volumes when working with Google Cloud's engineers. We actually had the precise number of terabytes of data we needed to load, and we could mimic that load with Google's engineers. They could then confirm that Google Cloud's FHIR service was capable of sustaining that load. It was a very healthy collaboration.

Amit Shah, Director,
GuideWell

"Edifecs' FHIR module acts as a bridge. Even if a provider isn't using FHIR, the bridge helps convert the APIs they are using into a consistent file format. Using the bridge means we don't have to build siloed solutions for our different providers."

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