

Tech Spot



Point-of-care chemistry analyzer for the community oncology setting

By Bittina Larson, Business Editor

Sandy Nevedal, lab manager for Hematology/Oncology Consultants in Michigan, and Karla Little, manager of lab services for the Cancer Center of the Carolinas provide convenience for patients while increasing practice revenues.

Hematology/Oncology Consultants has two centers with a total of eight physicians. "Our main site sees 120 patients a day, and our satellite office sees about 40 patients a day," Nevedal said. Although the Cancer Center of the Carolinas serves a multi-county upstate segment of the local population, Little said, the number of clinics in the network result in each clinic being small and community-based, rather than having the feel of a large medical center setting.

Typically, oncology centers require patients to obtain current lab results prior to chemotherapy treatments and to administer follow-up programs. The lab results are essential as they monitor the disease progress in patients and ensure they are not exposed to risks such as nephrotoxicity and hepatotoxicity. Insufficient data, like the patient forgetting to bring results with them or the lab providing insufficient results, may require rescheduling treatment. A rescheduled appointment can exacerbate the disease and can cause a loss of productivity and revenue for the treatment center.

With a point-of-care chemistry analyzer, such as the Piccolo Xpress, oncology practices can quickly check for shifts in blood chemistry and make real-time adjustments to chemotherapy dosage, ensuring patient health, and protecting physicians from liabilities arising from adverse events due to delayed treatment modifications. For the facility, this could mean improved efficiency, better patient care and satisfaction, and reduced risk associated with potential adverse events.

Nevedal has been working with Piccolo products for nearly two years. She told HONI that her practice has been very pleased with the use of the product. "We are now able to monitor kidney and liver functions through the test, which is nice, because patients can get treatment the same day without having to wait for results to come back from a lab."

Nevedal said the test works well in very busy clinics, "Even if you forget to start the machine, the results will be read, because when you put the disk in, the machine automatically starts to read it."

Little told HONI six out of nine of the Carolinas' centers have a lab and are using the Piccolo test, while one test is on a rotating schedule.

"Because a lot of our patients live in a rural setting, it is convenient; they don't have to come in two days in a row, one for a blood draw, and one for treatment," Little

said. "Now, they can come in just thirty minutes prior, and if they need fluids or anything, they can get them the same day, have their treatment, and be on their way."

Abaxis currently services both large and small oncology practices, said a company spokeswoman. The majority of the Abaxis customers are community-based centers not physically connected to a hospital or larger medical center. Four out of five of Abaxis' largest customers are oncology practices that run chemistries on up to 100 patients per day.

Nevedal said the piccolo test increases revenue in three main ways;

- It allows for faster turnaround of lab results, patients can be treated faster, and more patients can be treated each day, increasing both the efficiency and revenue for the practice.
- It allows for billing under different codes. For example, if a patient comes in with cold or flu-like symptoms, the physician can perform a full lab panel with the Piccolo, and discuss the results with the patient, as well as what the results mean for the patient's regular treatments. Because the doctor can sit down and discuss the test results with the patient the same day, they get reimbursed for a higher amount.
- The need for administrative personnel is reduced, because less follow-up appointments need to be set, and less calls need to be made to patients.