

“In today’s business environment we need to be fast, fluid and flexible. We now have those capabilities.”

—Kathy Qualls, Director of Business Operations



Photo by Dottie Stover, University Hall, University of Cincinnati

Situation: The Department of Internal Medicine at the University of Cincinnati operates in a complex business environment. The department interacts with two separate financial systems: a private practice corporation and the university financial system. The private practice accounting system includes funds derived from patient accounts and insurance claims. The university accounting system includes 60 to 80 different funds, made up of grants, endowments and state funds. Multiple sources of income from both financial systems flow into the department’s nine divisions, each a subspecialty expected to survive and function as an independent profit center.

Reporting and managing this financial environment required multiple complex spreadsheets that had to be rolled into one comprehensive report each month. The reports were labor intensive and subject to human error. Additionally, it took well over a month to generate a report, meaning that administrators were not always receiving timely information.

Solution: The department established a task force composed of senior administrative personnel and representatives from several divisions. The task force was charged with enhancing the financial reporting system to improve accuracy, reduce manual labor, enforce standards across all divisions, and ultimately to produce timely reports for better management decision making.

To aid in its work, the task force selected Department Manager™, a software system from IT Works, in Research Triangle Park, NC. Department Manager™ included modules for Accounting, Grants and Personnel. IT Works developed an interface to electronically import data from existing financial systems into a central repository. Reporting was customized to meet the specific needs of the department, its nine divisions and the university.

The department set a goal to implement the new system and have all users trained within six months of the start date.

Results: The new system was installed and users trained within the established time parameters. Electronic data input greatly improved accuracy and the time savings were dramatic. It became a 15-minute process to import department information into the Department Manager™ central repository. Once in the repository, the data could be used immediately to generate management reports. The monthly reporting process, which normally took a month and a half, is now typically completed in two days. The department’s annual report was completed two months earlier than in previous years. Department administrators have the ability to quickly and accurately generate the knowledge base they need for effective control and management of financial and personnel resources.

“Monthly financial reports that took five to six weeks are now typically generated in two days.”

—Neil F. Holsing, Technology Manager

Established in 1819, the College of Medicine at the University of Cincinnati is the oldest medical college west of the Allegheny Mountains and has a rich tradition of innovation and patient care. Over the years, its faculty, staff and alumni have been responsible for the first medical laser laboratory, the heart-lung machine, the first residency program in Emergency Medicine, the oral polio vaccine, the first antihistamine and a number of other achievements and distinctions.

The Department of Internal Medicine continues in this tradition by serving the dual role of student education and patient care. The department is composed of nine divisions: Cardiology, Digestive Diseases, Infectious Diseases, Pulmonary and Critical Care Medicine, Immunology and Allergy, Endocrinology and Metabolism, General Internal Medicine, Nephrology and Hypertension, and Hematology and Oncology.

Each division must function as an independent profit center, with funding coming from multiple sources, including patient care (fees and insurance payments) and university funds (any combination of 60 to 80 grants, endowments and state funding sources). Department administrators must be able to track and manage income and expenses from each source of income at each level of operation (from individual faculty members to divisions to the entire department). The result is a highly complex business environment, made even more demanding by the competitiveness and pressures of today's healthcare market.

The successful implementation of Department Manager™ has given the department and each division the tools needed for timely reports, while greatly reducing the potential for human error. The result is a system of knowledge with high credibility, enabling better decision making, planning and patient care.

Perspectives: “By implementing a system of automated data entry and timely reporting, we have been successful in shifting the focus of our administrators. Instead of spending their time trying to determine numbers and the accuracy of the information they receive, administrators can now focus on what the numbers actually mean. In effect, Department Manager™ has allowed us to shift from accounting to analysis. Administrators spend more time with true management concerns: accountability, planning, effective utilization of resources and improving our capabilities as educators and care providers.

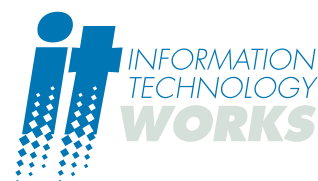
“In today's business environment, you need to be fast, fluid and flexible. If you have antiquated systems and antiquated tools you can't do that. Because of the timeliness and accuracy of the information we receive, Department Manager™ allows us to make better, knowledge-based decisions and to be more effective stewards of our resources.”

—Kathy Qualls, Director of Business Operations

“Any fundamental shift in technology can be difficult, but we were fortunate that Kathy and I both had been involved with system implementations in other organizations. Even given our prior experience, I thought our goal of having Department Manager™ selected, installed, customized and operational within six months was overly optimistic. With all of our other priorities and demands it was an unrealistic expectation, but we did it.

“The first key to our success was to involve senior administrators and divisional representatives from the very beginning. We established a task force and formed focus groups for each of the modules we installed. It was truly a team effort. A second critical component was the support we received from the software developer, IT Works. They took the time to understand our business processes and helped us design a system that was specific to our needs. We did not replace existing financial systems, we simply implemented a system that automated and improved the reporting process. IT Works was also able to share with us the benefits of their experience with other installations at other institutions. They became part of our team, and the result has been a huge success for our department and the way we do business.”

—Neil F. Holsing, Technology Manager



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