

# ONLINE INNOVATOR

CLEVELAND CLINIC'S  
C. MARTIN HARRIS,  
MD, MBA, HAS SET  
THE STANDARD  
FOR ENGAGING  
PATIENTS THROUGH  
ONLINE PORTALS.

**F**or C. Martin Harris, MD, MBA, his career track is likely similar to many in his profession—the path to the C-suite was not a straight line.

Harris, currently the chief information officer (CIO) of Cleveland Clinic, is a general internist by training. Early in his career, he completed the Robert Wood Johnson Clinical Scholars Fellowship at the Hospital of University of Pennsylvania. There, he focused his studies on the use of IT in medicine. But what was originally intended to be an academic endeavor turned out to be the beginning of his career's work.

"I was planning to become an academic health services researcher, a person who gathers a lot of data in the practice of medicine and uses the data to evaluate quality and cost," Harris says. "As I was looking at that, I realized that a lot of the data we had were not very good. They were collected by hand and weren't structured in any way, and we were drawing false conclusions from using the data in that way. So that really took me from the academic research side to the practical side."

This discovery prompted Harris to shift gears in his career, which ultimately led to him becoming the hospital's first CIO. He came to the Cleveland Clinic in 1996, where his primary focus was the use of IT in the practice of medicine. Since then, Harris has helped launch the clinic's patient portal, as well as dozens of

other innovative technology initiatives, such as the online second opinion tool MyConsult, DrConnect, and MyPractice Community.

Through DrConnect, physicians who refer their patients to Cleveland Clinic can see everything their patients do, in real-time, while at the clinic. All the physicians need is a browser and an online account, Harris says.

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"Physicians log into the secure site where they can literally see the care that's being delivered to their patients," Harris says.

"Our goal is to ensure that those physicians are virtual partners with us. If they feel like something is missing, they can send a message to the physician at the clinic who is with the patient." Also, when the patient returns to

the referring physician's office, that physician is caught up on the patient's care.

MyPractice Community is a service for physicians who practice in one of the clinic's nine affiliated hospitals in northeast Ohio. Those physicians have access to the same electronic health records (EHRs) as physicians at the main hospital, but the records are delivered over the Internet.

"The physicians do not need to have any technical personnel in their office to use this tool," Harris says.

"We take care of all of the design and setup, all of the go-live support and training, and the ongoing support of the system."

Making these tools available to outside physicians is something that Harris says breeds necessary collaboration.

"Frequently in the literature, you'll see IT and EHRs as something for physicians and nurses. But you need to step back and realize that these are tools not only for your own physicians and nurses, but also for physicians and nurses and other allied health professionals not employed by your organization, as well as tools for patients and payers," he says. "You really need to broaden the definition to a set of tools that help transform your organization into a 21st century practice model that includes all of the participants." ■

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