

For Atlantic Radiology Associates, after-hours final reads are a 'slam dunk'

By Michael Walter

imagingBiz.com

In healthcare, as in life, relationships evolve over time. Take, for instance, Atlantic Radiology Associates (ARA) in Savannah, Ga., a 12-radiologist group serving hospitals throughout Georgia, South Carolina and Florida. ARA first started working with vRad, the country's largest teleradiology provider, back in 2007, with vRad handling preliminary weekend and overnight reads for one of the group's busiest hospitals.



Jeff Kinlaw

In 2011, however, ARA asked vRad to start handling final weekend and overnight reads instead of preliminary, and for a larger number of facilities. What brought on the change? As Jeff Kinlaw, ARA CEO, explains, vRad had proven its value to the organization's leadership by providing high-quality preliminary reads for four years. The time was right to take that next step in their working relationship.

"Making that transition to vRad providing final reads was a good experience for us," Kinlaw says. "Financially, it was a slam dunk because the modest cost increase is offset by the elimination of morning overreads. And there's nothing physicians hate more than reading an examination that's already been read or paying for something twice, so it just seemed natural for those overnight and weekend reads to be final reads instead of just preliminary."

Smarter workflows, additional freedom

When Kinlaw makes big-picture decisions at ARA, he says workflow is always a top priority. If something isn't efficient, it simply isn't going to happen. Taking

advantage of final reads from vRad made perfect sense for just this reason: it took a serious weight off his team's shoulders first thing in the morning and allowed them to carry on with their day-to-day tasks, which include working closely with a radiologist residency program in addition to their daily responsibilities.

"The most onerous work that needed to be done under the "prelim" model was obviously those overnight and weekend reads," Kinlaw says. "Replacing prelims with after-hours final reads allowed me to free up local reading capacity and ultimately bring more work to my group."

Another advantage of working with vRad is that it allows an imaging group to sign new contracts, take on more work and grow its brand without immediately hiring additional radiologists. It takes considerable time to interview job candidates, hire new physicians and get them up to speed, not to mention all of the paperwork and financial considerations. Working so closely with vRad means Kinlaw can spend less time

worrying about those details and put more energy into growing his practice. “Instead of hiring someone before I take on additional work, I can just ask vRad to handle more reads,” he says. “I have that freedom now.”

Working with vRad also gives ARA freedom when it comes to filling unexpected holes in daytime coverage. Kinlaw notes that the company has “saved our bacon” on more than one occasion over the years when regularly scheduled radiologists were unable to make it into the office.

Easing concerns

While more and more healthcare providers embrace the rising trend of teleradiology, others remain skeptical about getting reads from a radiologist who may not necessarily be nearby when they do the work. “Can the teleradiologist be trusted?” they might wonder. “Will there be a drop in quality?”

Kinlaw says he witnessed such hesitation firsthand, but he has always been confident in vRad’s reads and has never had a problem reassuring the facility. “Sometimes, it takes a little educating when I tell executive leadership at a facility that a teleradiology provider will be doing final reads,” he says. “I’m able to bring them around by discussing the QA process and review, the fact that they’ll be getting a final read right away, and that we’re removing the potential for discordance between prelim and final reports.”

It never takes long for hospitals to realize their concerns were unsubstantiated, he adds, since vRad is always easy to do business with, professional and has consistent processes for flagging studies or working

with ARA’s own radiologists to make communication a breeze. In addition, Kinlaw notes, the turnaround times from vRad are always lightning fast. “It’s a tremendously powerful benefit for emergency room physicians and inpatient physicians to have a final report in short order,” he says. “In our experience, vRad’s radiologists don’t just meet a facility’s deadlines as specified in the contract, they exceed those deadlines.”

When teleradiologists are engaged to perform after-hours reads radiology providers commonly fear they could potentially lose their contract. Again, however, Kinlaw says this is a non-issue. “To the contrary! My vRad area director has actually brought new opportunities to me.” vRad isn’t competition; they’re helping ARA take its business to the next level. It’s a win-win situation for both parties, and he’s confident enough in the abilities of his own team that he never views vRad’s assistance in a negative light.

“We have personal relationships with these facilities and they depend on us for reads as well as other services,” he says. “If you’re really afraid that someone working nights and weekends is going to take your contract from you, I would say the level of service you provide during the day is not adequate.”

Five years after vRad first started handling final after-hours reads, everyone at ARA—from its radiologists to its leadership team—is still reaping the benefits. Relationships in healthcare do evolve over time, and the partnership between ARA and vRad is as strong as ever.

To learn more about how vRad supports radiology programs with final reports, [click here](#).