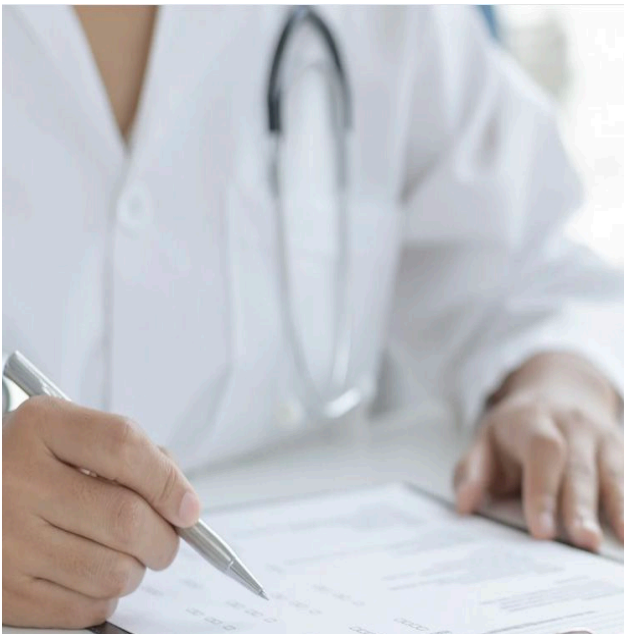


# Arista|MD



Case Study

## TrueCare



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A FEDERALLY QUALIFIED HEALTH CENTER



## About TrueCare

Private, non-profit Federally Qualified Health Center with 13 clinical care sites serving over 65,000 patients per month in North San Diego County, California.

Over 85% of TrueCare's patients are either insured by Medicaid, Medicare or are uninsured.

The population served is relatively young, but with advanced chronic disease due to long-deferred care or inaccessibility to care.

TrueCare averages over 300,000 visits per year and over 3,000 referrals per month.

Most frequently used specialties for referrals: dermatology, endocrinology, hematology, orthopedics and pediatrics.

## The Challenge

TrueCare has a distinguished, nearly half-century-long history of serving the primary care needs of a largely low-income, working poor population in North San Diego County, California. TrueCare's mission is to address disparities in care confronted by those in lower socioeconomic groups, ensuring access to high-quality, effective primary care services.

Like many non-profit Federally Qualified Health Centers that work with underserved patient populations, TrueCare faces significant challenges in obtaining specialty care for its patients. Reasons that vulnerable patients in a group that includes the elderly, rural residents and immigrants experience difficulty in accessing specialty care include a scarcity of specialists who accept Medicaid due to low reimbursement, and patients' own difficulty in arranging childcare and/or transportation. This leads to long wait times for appointments, reduced access to care and deteriorating health for Medicaid patients unable to obtain needed specialty care.

A 2022 survey by consulting firm Merritt Hawkins illustrates the difficulty that Medicaid and Medicare patients in major U.S. cities, including San Diego, face in accessing specialty care. For example, the survey found that such patients in San Diego endure longer wait times on average (55 days) for appointments with an orthopedic surgeon than any of the other 14 cities surveyed. For OBGYN appointments, the average wait time in San Diego was 38 days, but just 17 percent of the San Diego obstetricians and gynecologists surveyed accepted Medicaid patients.

At TrueCare, monthly demand for specialty care averages between 2,500 and 3,000 referrals per month, but only about 35 percent of patients ever end up obtaining that specialty care for a number of these reasons: affordability, access, geography — so the health center's patients often don't receive the level of care they require.

Further, these access issues are occurring at a time when the nation confronts a looming peril: a specialist shortage, which The Association of American Medical Colleges predicts be between 28,000 and 64,000 by 2025.

## The Solution

With the knowledge that patients' challenges in obtaining specialty care would likely persist in the future, TrueCare physicians began the process of exploring technology solutions that could alleviate the problem. After a thorough evaluation period, TrueCare selected AristaMD, whose platform facilitates communication between primary care physicians (PCPs) and specialists by leveraging eConsults. An eConsult is an asynchronous, digital consultation between the PCP and the specialist that provides timely access to high quality specialty care guidance through seamless, secure online communications and information exchange. The HIPAA-compliant platform connects PCPs to specialists, leveraging a national, board-certified panel that addresses more than 70 specialty and sub-specialty areas with consults often delivered within a few hours.

Additionally, AristaMD's platform offers more than 200 clinical work-up checklists created by clinicians. These checklists feature proven clinical guidelines that prompt valuable next steps for further evaluation and treatment, ensuring the appropriate work-up is completed every time. In June 2016, after gaining familiarity with AristaMD's platform and processes, TrueCare launched a pilot of the program at three clinics involving approximately 10 providers. The pilot's goal was to provide answers to two questions: First, "Are eConsults a useful approach to improving quality and access to specialty-guided care?" and second, "Is the AristaMD platform adaptable and acceptable to busy primary care providers in a community medicine practice?"

 The results exceeded our expectations in terms of the ease of adopting AristaMD's service into the primary care workflow.

## The Results

Truecare was so pleased with the results of the pilot that the health system's leadership decided — after just four months — to expand the use of AristaMD's eConsult platform to 13 clinics from the initial three.

Currently, TrueCare's patients have more access than ever before. Thanks to eConsults and Medi-Cal (California's Medicaid program), which pays for a variety of medical services for children and adults with limited income and resources.



## Notable Findings

**78%** of eConsults resolved patients' issues, rendering a specialist visit unnecessary.

**94%** eConsult responses significantly influenced the patient care plan developed by the requesting provider.



Nearly **two-thirds** of patients received the answers they needed within **four hours**, without the need for an in-person visit with a specialist.



**Increased patient satisfaction**, as patients gain greater access to specialty care without having to leave the comfort and familiarity of their own PCP's office, further sparing them the time and expense of transportation to a specialist's office.



**Increased provider satisfaction**, with providers able to evolve relationships with specialists, and work in a virtual multi-specialty group practice, which improves the scope of practice, enhances real-time learning and enriches the professional experience.

By delivering access to specialty care to patients who likely would've gone without, the AristaMD platform holds strong potential to reduce hospital admissions and emergency room visits among patient populations that obtain specialty care through eConsults. Similarly, AristaMD's solution is likely to reduce hospital and ER admissions by accelerating access to specialty-guided care. In essence, the platform enables in as little as a few hours the delivery of specialty care that otherwise may have taken months.

Also notable is that AristaMD's solution helped TrueCare to continue leveraging the talents of mid-level providers, such as nurse practitioners and physician assistants, in delivering primary care. The platform's workup checklists are of particular value to the mid-level practitioners for ensuring that all necessary tests are completed prior to referral and all appropriate information is sent to the specialist quickly and securely.

Additionally, TrueCare providers benefited from electronic health records (EHR) integration with the AristaMD platform, which enables providers to seamlessly order eConsults through the clinic's EHR with minimal workflow disruption and time investment.



## eConsult Service Expansion

With the AristaMD platform, TrueCare extended the capabilities of its primary care providers and expanded access to specialty care for its patients. The health system uses AristaMD's Referral Navigation Nurses (RNN) to ensure the service is available to providers at all clinical sites. Because the service enables providers to quickly and nearly effortlessly order eConsults, TrueCare's leadership increased utilization of eConsults upon completion of the RNN roll-out. TrueCare realized increased provider satisfaction and a greater return on investment with the use of RNNs in combination with the AristaMD platform. In addition more patients received the benefit of wider access to specialty care.

My question to payers is: "What's your solution to the problem of specialty care access for underserved populations?"

