

Healthcare IT News

## Gulf Coast clinics move to digitize records post-Katrina

By *Richard Pizzi, Associate Editor* | 09/18/07 |

In the wake of the Hurricane Katrina disaster, an urgent care provider on the Mississippi Gulf Coast has decided to implement an electronic medical records system in its two clinics.

South Mississippi Urgent Care is working with Austin, Texas-based vendor PracticeIT, which specializes in EMRs and handheld diagnostic devices, to complete its move to electronic records.

SMUC currently has two locations and plans on opening two more this year. The next clinic will open in Biloxi, MS, in Oct. 2007. SMUC claims to be the first medical facility to adopt an EMR system in the region after Hurricane Katrina struck the Gulf Coast in 2005.

"If we have a catastrophic event, such as Hurricane Katrina, our patient's records are protected," said Ronnie Ali, DO, head physician at SMUC. "I think it's important for the people of this region to have the assurance that their medical records are safe no matter what happens."

After Hurricane Katrina destroyed over 100 healthcare centers and almost 1 million patient medical records, Dr. Ali said he saw the need for medical care in the community and felt that it was his duty to help his fellow neighbors on the Gulf Coast.

Ali said that he implemented an EMR to give him immediate access to critical patient information – such as drug allergies, current medications, and medical history - in order to treat patients faster and more safely in the event of a disaster.

The EMR system also keeps billing and documentation records for SMUC. PracticeIT representatives say that the system links the clinics together, making it easier for patients to seek care at different locations.

"Our goal was to create a customized solution for the clinics while lessening the hassle and wait time for patients seeking immediate care," said Bob Teague, CEO of PracticeIT.