

# In Sentry, rural health system finds unparalleled support and a strategic ally

*T.J. Regional Health is the parent company of T.J. Samson Community Hospital and T.J. Health Columbia Hospital, serving south-central Kentucky. Both are designated as disproportionate share hospitals and are fully accredited by the Joint Commission.*

## The Challenge

### Complexity Managing the Complexity

T.J. Regional is hardly new to 340B, having launched its program at its flagship T.J. Samson Community Hospital in Glasgow, Ky. roughly 15 years ago and then enrolling T.J. Health Columbia when it acquired and renamed the former Westlake Regional Hospital in 2016.

But as the program matured and became more complex, and the health system grew and added new providers, clinics and specialties, 340B leaders found it difficult to keep up with the changes and assure 100% program compliance.

At the root of it, T.J. Regional was relying on four different software applications to help manage its program, which created a lot of inefficiencies and added complexity to day-to-day operations. For instance, whenever a new manufacturer notice or federal directive was posted to HRSA's website, or a new provider needed to be added to the data feeds, employees had to make adjustments in all

four systems to ensure that the changes were incorporated into the hospital's processes.

"From a relationship standpoint, we didn't have a dedicated account manager or any type of actual relationship" with any of the vendors, said John Thomas Rogers, the compliance officer and risk manager for T.J. Regional and its former 340B coordinator. "We had one of the other large, national 340B software systems as our primary vendor servicing the mixed-use part of the program. It was a generic customer help line, no real touchpoint, not great follow-up."

Also missing from any of its four 340B management vendors were any strategic advisory services about how to navigate the changing landscape of 340B or any robust training resources on how to use the software to maximize benefits. What's more, none of the four software vendors were particularly proactive about pointing out opportunities to enhance T.J. Regional's 340B program.

## The Change

### Finding a supportive 340B Partner

So the health system undertook a market assessment of 340B software solutions. It signed up for product demonstrations with several vendors and solicited recommendations from their peers at other hospitals. With a pool of potential suitors, it issued a request for proposals.

From the peer recommendations, the returned RFPs and team approach, Sentry rose to the top.

“When we made the conversion to Sentry, what stood out to me was the support that we received,” Rogers said. “We had multiple meetings onsite where there were several people from Sentry that came to do product demonstrations. We had a dedicated primary contact point for auditing, and we had one for the billing side. Having that dedicated person to go to for the build-out and support was key for us.”

The health system signed with Sentry in October 2019 and launched with Sentinel and Sentrex, the 340B management platforms for outpatient hospital pharmacy and contract pharmacy, respectively. They also implemented the Sentrex eRx Eligibility Check module, which uses e-prescription data to tie prescriptions to service locations for expanded 340B eligibility. Twelve months later, the health system added Referral Verification System, or RVS, which captures eligible prescriptions written by outside providers.

Adding RVS to the mix, staff say, is a good example of another benefit they quickly realized from partnering with Sentry: the company’s proactiveness in finding and suggesting ways to strengthen their 340B program and maximize benefits.

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*T.J. Morgan, 340B analyst*

Prior to adding RVS, T.J. Regional had no processes in place to capture prescriptions written by non-credentialed providers to whom it had referred its patients, and little understanding of the compliance aspects of doing so. Account managers from Sentry persuaded hospital staff to enlist in RVS after demonstrating how to ensure compliance by establishing responsibility for the patient’s

care, being able to document the referral, and accounting for referrals in its 340B policies and procedures.

Another perk was Sentry’s robust training program for refreshers on how best to use its platforms to maximize 340B benefits.

“I would compare pre-Sentry to pre-Google and pre-YouTube,” said T.J. Morgan, a 340B analyst. “It’s like before, the only way you knew how to do something was, you did it. And now, we have resources to walk us through things and help us with questions.”

Switching to Sentry also resulted in a major time savings for those who work on the front lines of T.J. Regional’s 340B program.

“Before, we had to go into several different systems just to do a basic audit,” said Faye Jessie, T.J. Regional’s 340B coordinator. “So that was kind of hard, and then every system was so different. Also, I take care of the provider panel, and it seemed like I had to turn in four different provider panels every two weeks.

“The simplicity of having it all in a one-stop-shop has been great.”

## The Result

### A growing, 100% Compliant 340B Program

Enlisting Sentry as a partner has paid many dividends to T.J. Regional, which serves a highly vulnerable patient population. Medicare and Medicaid make up roughly two-thirds of its payer mix, and its disproportionate share patient percentage at both hospitals is above 20%. Sentry has helped the growing health system expand its 340B benefits by dramatically increasing its capture rate.

That, in turn, has helped T.J. expand services to indigent patients, including financial assistance, copay savings and other programs, and it has added new specialty programs it wouldn't otherwise be able to offer. It has also helped counter-balance uncompensated care.

Outside the walls of the hospitals, T.J. Regional has been able to expand its network of 340B contract pharmacies. Some of them are small, independent pharmacies that lack the staffing and financial resources of the big corporate chains. So Sentry's technical support and confidence has been invaluable for enlisting contract pharmacies and helping them overcome challenges, staff say.

Another major benefit has been stronger compliance, with additional new functionalities and configurations tailored to the needs and capabilities of T.J. Regional Health.

"Our 340B program is rooted in compliance, and we want to make sure that we're doing the right thing," Rogers, the compliance officer, said. "Because if the day comes when we are audited, we want to make sure we're not sweating bullets that day. And when they come in, we have the support there for those situations, and we feel good about the product that we have. The support that we've gotten from Sentry has been great in terms of those things."

Perhaps the most intangible benefit is a confidence that its 340B program is performing at its potential and is on solid ground.

"If you asked, if you were re-evaluating software systems today, would you have selected Sentry? I think the strongest endorsement that I can say is yes, absolutely I would, and my only regret is that we didn't do it sooner," Rogers said.

