

Case study

CNY Family Care

Serving 2,500 patients a week from a single location in East Syracuse, New York, CNY family Care takes care of patients from birth until death. The family practice is staffed with 11 full-time physicians, 11 nurse practitioners and physician assistants, 75 nurses and 53 administrative personnel. CNY Family Care is growing by 400 to 600 patients per month.

“We introduce the Patient Portal to patients in multiple ways,” explains Dr. Joseph Augustine M.D., physician and co-founder of CNY Family Care.

“Patients are told about the Portal when they call for an appointment, and a Portal letter is included in our new patient package and when we mail lab results. There are Portal signs all over the office, and patients hear a Portal message on the answering machine and when they’re on hold. Also, I explain to patients in the exam room that they can get their lab results that evening on the Portal or in five business days in the mail.”

CHALLENGES

Founded in 1999 by four senior partners who had used MEDENT in a previous practice, CNY Family Care implemented MEDENT Practice Management within the first month. To eliminate paper charts and become more efficient and cost effective, in 2004 the practice began an evolution to MEDENT EMR. By 2012, CNY Family Care wanted to further reduce costs and recognized the need to strengthen communication with patients through a portal.

SOLUTION

In March, 2012, CNY Family Care implemented the MEDENT Patient Portal.

“We have over 8,600 active Portal patients. We expect to cut our postage costs in half and have already seen a reduction in calls to the front desk.”

Pam Wilson, Director of Nursing
CNY Family Care

CNY Family Care uses the Lab Results Clearinghouse, MEDENT's point and click technology and such functions as e-prescribing. Their EKG and spirometry equipment is directly integrated with MEDENT. For some disease conditions, physicians graph lab results in a "flowsheet" to help with disease management. "We graph recurrent labs such as glucose levels, cholesterol and Coumadin for patients with specific diagnoses such as diabetes," states Dr. Augustine. "We also use MEDENT's Disease Management (DM) formulas." Pam Wilson adds that they use the DM outcome tracking reports to identify patients for preventative follow-up. Also, they run DM practice-wide reports.

The practice has been using the MEDENT Patient Portal for about two years and has over 8,600 active users. Colleen Roche, Office Manager for CNY Family Care states that there is a lot of work involved in making a Portal successful. At CNY Family Care, nearly all staff are involved in communicating about the Portal, and the practice introduces and encourages its use in multiple ways. When a patient calls to make an initial appointment, they are told about the Portal. A Portal letter is part of the new patient package which is mailed to all new patients. When lab results are mailed, a portal letter is included. When patients call and are placed on hold or when they call after hours and get the answering machine, they are told about the Portal. Providers remind patients they can learn their lab results quickly on the Portal and can message for none urgent matters rather than wait on the phone. There are Portal signs throughout the office, including in the exam rooms.

Patients use the Portal to request refills, to request and cancel appointments, to ask questions and to get lab results. Patients can message over the Portal when they want to make an appointment, and a staff person calls them back to schedule it. Patients can request a referral which is reviewed by a provider who decides whether to make the referral or have the patient come in for an office visit. Increasingly, patients use the Portal to update their history, and new patients put their history in the Portal prior to their first appointment. Patients use the messaging capability to let their doctor know that a new med is working. "Patients who are computer savvy love the Portal," explains Dr. Augustine. "I believe use of the Portal will get better and better over time. The more patients use the Portal the more they want to use it."

The reaction to the Portal by CNY Family Care's providers has been very good. "We like having fewer calls and being able to respond on our own time," states Dr. Augustine. "Since the practice is growing at a rate of 400 to 600 new patients a month, it's difficult to quantify the impact of the Portal on the number of calls to providers, although I believe the number of calls is probably lower. The number of phone calls to the front desk has definitely decreased since each triage message received now over the Portal would have been a phone call in the past."

"Eventually we expect to see a large reduction in our postage costs as well as a major reduction in the staff time spent mailing letters and talking to patients about matters which could be handled over the Portal," states Pam. "In many instances, the Portal saves a phone call or multiple phone calls. This translates into cost savings. For example, billing people are free to do work they would not get done if they were on the phone with a patient."

“Our overall experience with MEDENT has been very positive,” states Pam. “There is a good working relationship, and MEDENT has done a good job staying ahead of the curve. When people from other practices come in and compare how they’ve done with our experience using MEDENT, they are amazed at how well we’ve done.”

RESULTS

Two years after implementing the Portal, CNY Family Care has over 8,600 active users. As the number of users grows and the ways in which it is used expands, the practice expects to realize significant reductions in costs and major increases in staff efficiency.

Pam believes that the MEDENT system has made CNY Family Care a much better practice. “We are more efficient. We wouldn’t be able to see the number of patients we see without MEDENT. We are able to track our practice toward patient goals and know how well we are doing taking care of patients. We have access to lots of data. For example, if a provider ordered a lab and a patient hasn’t had the lab, we are aware of it.”

CNY Family Care is doing Meaningful Use and has surpassed requirements for the number of patients using the Portal. Currently the practice is upgrading their system for Stage 2 of Meaningful Use. Certified as a Patient-Centered Medical Home, the practice is recertifying under 2011 standards. “With MEDENT we are able to easily pull data that is already in the system,” explains Colleen.