

Efficiency, Safety and Organization Have Laid the Foundation for Pay-for-Performance

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Finding their DOS-based system cumbersome and inefficient, in 2000, Prima Healthcare implemented MEDENT Practice Management from Community Computer Service. Accounts Receivable dropped from one million to half a million, and staff needed to do billing went from five to one. In 2003, the practice implemented MEDENT EMR. Prima Healthcare reduced overhead further and virtually eliminated paper. They have a safer, better organized and more efficient system to support patient care. Physicians see more patients each day while spending less time at the office. And Prima Healthcare is well-positioned to participate in pay-for-performance.

Situation

Located in Salem, Ohio, Prima Healthcare, a large family and internal medicine practice, serves a broad age range from pediatric to geriatric patients. Operating from three locations and a hospital, eleven full-time and one part-time physician as well as a part-time nurse practitioner provide services to approximately two thousand patients a week. Additional staff include nine medical assistants and five people in radiology.

Dr. Steven DeMaiolo and two partners founded Prima Healthcare in 1990. “The biggest challenge we face today is running an efficient practice that provides quality care in a difficult financial environment of flat reimbursements and increasing costs,” states Dr. DeMaiolo. “EMR has been a major contributor to our success in meeting this challenge.”

In its first decade, Prima Healthcare used a DOS-based system for scheduling and billing. “It was cumbersome and inefficient,” explains Dr. DeMaiolo, “and it wasn’t keeping pace with what needed to be done.”

Solution

In 2000, the practice began using MEDENT Practice Management from Community Computer for scheduling and billing. Prima Healthcare’s Accounts Receivable went from one million to half a million. One person was able to do billing, whereas previously it had required five. “The change was immediate and dramatic,” states Dr. DeMaiolo. “Reduction in Accounts Receivable and in turnaround time were key turning points in the practice.”

“By 2003, we knew we wanted to create a situation in which staff could work more efficiently,” comments Dr. DeMaiolo. “We wanted to lessen repetition and mundane tasks. We wanted to work smarter, not harder. We decided to implement MEDENT EMR.”

Prima Healthcare uses Community Computer's service for creation and mailing of patient statements. The practice submits its claims electronically. Through the Lab Results Clearinghouse module, Prima Healthcare interfaces with Quest Laboratory. Lab reports are received electronically in a format which enables the practice to generate letters and to triage to patients regarding results. Information from the hospital or specialists comes in via fax and goes directly into the MEDENT system. There is no paper involved.

Nurses and physicians have portable laptops. Remaining staff have desktop PCs. The practice has increasingly used templates to document patient visits, and most providers document visits at the time of the visit. "Our goal is that physicians complete their notes before moving on to the next patient," states Dr. DeMaiolo. "This is much more efficient and means our physicians don't need to later try to recall 30 visits and struggle with variable recall."

Dr. DeMaiolo believes that use of MEDENT has improved patient care because the organization of data is much better. "We're able to find the data we need," explains Dr. DeMaiolo. "For example, with medication the system keeps track of information automatically such as the date it was prescribed, who prescribed it, and why it was prescribed or discontinued. There's no question about who did what. This extensive tracking is too cumbersome to do in a paper chart."

The MEDENT e-mail module is used extensively at Prima Healthcare, and it is credited with having dramatically reduced the noise level in the office. "Internal e-mail is indispensable," exclaims Dr. DeMaiolo. "I couldn't manage without it."

Prima Healthcare has found Community Computer very responsive. "I can't say enough positive," states Dr. DeMaiolo. "Community Computer has a partnership with physicians to mutually improve the system. They've made a commitment to go forward, and we've been able to reap the benefits for our practice. We've been able to grow with the company, from scheduling and billing to a full-blown EMR to the cutting-edge functionality needed for disease management and pay-for-performance."

Benefits

With MEDENT Practice Management, Prima Healthcare reduced Accounts Receivable by fifty percent. Staff needed to do billing went from five to one. EMR has reduced overhead further and virtually eliminated paper. Also, it has provided a safer, better organized and more efficient system. Physicians are able to see more patients each day while spending less time at the office.

One of the most significant ways the MEDENT system has impacted Prima Healthcare is that they have a safer system to support physicians in providing patient care. "For example, there is much less chance for error with the medication list built in to the system, and the quality of documentation is much better," describes Dr. DeMaiolo. "The MEDENT system allows you to get a reproducible level of documentation. In a paper chart there is a lot of variability."

The practice has become more efficient. No longer does staff spend time pulling charts or looking for charts they are not able to find. Prima Healthcare has been able to shift personnel to tasks more meaningful to the person and to the practice. "Overhead is reduced," states Dr. DeMaiolo. "Less

staff time is needed for billing and administration and in the front and back.”

Prima Healthcare has been able to improve physicians’ lifestyles. Before EMR, if a physician needed to work on a chart on the week-end, they had to drive into the office. Now physicians have wireless access to charts from home. Dr. DeMaiolo sees this as a huge advantage. The physician’s day is easier and each physician is able to see a few more patients each day.

In the near future, the practice will begin to use MEDENT’s Disease Management/Health Management formulas. The physicians will use functionality such as graphing of lab results to help in the management of chronic diseases. “I believe that physicians using paper charts will not be able to participate in pay-for-performance,” states Dr. Maiolo. “With paper charts it will not be possible to pull the needed information and achieve the accountability required.”

Dr. DeMaiolo unhesitatingly advises physicians to implement EMR. “While change is always difficult,” reflects Dr. DeMaiolo, “the benefits are so enormous and the alternative so poor. I urge residents not to consider a residency or joining a practice if there isn’t an EMR. Anyone not looking at EMR is not part of the future.”