

Case study

Trinity Family Medicine

A family medical practice located in Weedsport, New York, Trinity Family Medicine serves a broad range of patients, from new-borns to the elderly. The practice is staffed by a full-time physician, a nurse, a business manager and a receptionist, augmented by a couple of part-time staff. Trinity Family Medicine serves up to 150 patients a week and does minor surgery but not obstetrics. The practice has achieved Meaningful Use.

“For the first time in medicine, patients can view their own medical record and make sure it’s accurate,” states Dr. Sean Boyle, M.D., physician and founder of Trinity Family Practice. “The Patient Portal improves patient care and provides significant benefit to patients. Also, it has increased staff efficiency, reduced telephone calls, streamlined patient/doctor communication and ended telephone tag.”

CHALLENGES

Dr. Boyle founded Trinity Family Medicine in 1994 and began using MEDENT Practice Management and EMR the subsequent year. Well-versed in the trends in healthcare, Dr. Boyle has remained in the forefront of new functionality. In 2012 he recognized the importance of implementing a patient portal, both to serve the needs of patients and to meet the requirements of Meaningful Use Stage 2.

SOLUTION

Prior to implementing the MEDENT Patient Portal in November, 2012, Trinity Family Medicine began alerting patients that it would soon be available.

“The patient portal is one of the major components of Meaningful Use 2, and there’s a high bar to meet the goals. Many physicians will be caught unawares.”

Sean Boyle, M.D., physician and founder
Trinity Family Medicine

Trinity Family Medicine uses much of the functionality of MEDENT, including the Lab Results Clearinghouse, the Disease Management formulas, E-prescribing and the capability to directly link medical equipment to MEDENT to record vital signs such as blood pressure, pulse, temperature and body oxygen level. Dr. Boyle compares therapies and results and displays them using MEDENT's graphs and flowsheets during patient visits.

When Trinity Family Medicine rolled out the Portal, they gave patients information to take with them to sign up in their home. "The percent of people who signed up was low," explains Dr. Boyle. "It simply wasn't high on people's list, and if they ran into trouble, they gave up."

Dr. Boyle concluded a different approach was needed. "At the end of office visits, I began asking patients if they had e-mail and I showed them the Portal, what it can do and signed them up. Patients were surprised at how easy the Portal is to use, and nearly all of the patients to whom I introduced it began to use it. There was a major difference in results with the personal approach," continues Dr. Boyle. "I believe there needs to be a dedicated guru or someone on staff with enthusiasm for a patient portal and time to sign people up."

Currently, a little over six months since roll-out of the Portal, 70 percent of Trinity's patients use the Portal. "The usage numbers are high for everyone from teenagers to patients up into their 60s," states Dr. Boyle. "Some people in their 80s also make extensive use of the Portal whereas others in that age group do not own or use a computer."

Patients request appointments through the Portal. "This enables them at the end of their workday when they have time to reflect about their health to request an appointment even though Trinity is closed," describes Dr. Boyle. "They don't have to remember to call the next day and probably get placed on hold. Staff get back to patients with several choices, and the patient then selects a time. Patients also use the Portal to request refills and view lab results."

Dr. Boyle makes extensive use of the messaging capability of the Portal. "I use it every day, all day," describes Dr. Boyle. "It's a good way to triage, and it is well integrated with MEDENT. There is probably a 25 percent reduction in calls to staff, enabling them to spend time on the phone with challenging patients. If a patient sends a note through the Portal which relates to medicine or is clinical in nature, it goes directly to me rather than through a 3rd party such as the receptionist or nurse. Previously, a patient would speak to the nurse who would then speak to me. I would respond to the nurse who would respond to the patient. There is a dilution of information when it goes through a number of people. Now the patient communicates directly with the doctor, and the process is much more streamlined. It greatly increases efficiency."

"For most patients the response to the Portal has been overwhelmingly positive," states Dr. Boyle. "Whether young or old, they derive significant benefit from it. Even though the Portal is in its infancy, it is able to do a lot. It is the first time in medicine that patients can view their own medical record and make sure it's accurate. It empowers patients and makes them a partner. It brings an end to telephone tag which consumes so much time. That's one of its biggest benefits."

Sample of Patients' View of the Portal –

“I’ve used the portal to make appointments and get new prescriptions. I don’t have to wait until the office opens at 8:30, and I don’t end up getting put on hold while the staff does something else.”

- Edith P., 86 year old

“I use the portal to request prescriptions and to e-mail Dr. Boyle with questions about the various medical issues I’ve had. I like that I can contact Dr. Boyle in the evening and get a quick response and not have to wait for an appointment. It’s like a one-on-one consultation with the doctor rather than going through others in the office.”

- Siobhan P., 25 year old

“The portal is very informative, user-friendly and easy to use. I use it mostly to ask Dr. Boyle questions which occur to me after an office visit or after the work day has ended. I’ve also used the portal to look up information on a specific drug or on a medical condition.”

- Violet W., 57 year old

“My first use of the portal was when my 10-year-old had an allergic reaction. I phoned the office and talked to the receptionist. Dr. Boyle contacted me through the portal and got a new prescription to the pharmacy where I could pick it up. The portal was such a pleasure to us. I now request refills through the portal, and I can ask questions and get them answered by Dr. Boyle. Information is not lost through the receptionist who is very busy. Once I had a question about my two-year-old who had a cough and stuffy nose. I used the portal and questioned whether I should give the child medication. Dr. Boyle gave an answer within an hour advising with what symptom to give the meds.”

- Christine M., 43-year-old mother of eight

“My use of the portal has been mostly focused on my dad since he has been having more medical problems. I’ve been able to go on and check his meds and the exact time of my parents’ appointments. Recently on a Saturday I had to take my dad to the E.R. I was able to get right on the portal and review my dad’s record. I was able to report to Dr. Boyle that my dad was in the hospital and learn whether a follow-up appointment was needed. Dr. Boyle got back to me in a couple of hours. Sometimes it’s also helpful to communicate with Dr. Boyle during office hours. I wouldn’t call the doctor when he’s with patients, but sometimes I have a question which just needs a quick answer. I wasn’t sure I’d find the portal useful but it has turned out to be very useful.”

- Susan P., daughter of Gilbert and Grace, both 85

Dr. Boyle states that the Portal is particularly helpful with psychiatric patients who need to contact him a week or two after an office visit to let him know how they are doing. "Most seem more comfortable journaling their report on the Portal and then sending it. And for the doctor, all is documented. There is not the additional requirement after a conversation to document it. The patient has put the information in words and it's more accurate."

Trinity has recently begun using the Talksoft Appointment Reminder System. Previously, the receptionist would telephone patients the day prior to remind them of their upcoming appointment. Talksoft now performs that task. "It frees up the receptionist," explains Dr. Boyle. "Talksoft has worked out nicely and increases efficiency in the office. Everything is documented including whether a person answered the phone or the call went to an answering system." In addition, Talksoft sends reminder e-mails to these patients with a link to the patient's Portal so they can review and update their history, meds and other information before their scheduled appointment. Any patient not yet on the Portal can sign up.

Dr. Boyle has been very happy with MEDENT Inc. "They have great integrity. For one thing, they do not oversell. They sell only to as many practices as they can really service. They support what they sell, and they are very professional."

RESULTS

Trinity's use of the MEDENT Portal has provided many benefits to its patients including greater convenience in requesting appointments and refills, ability to view and update their medical chart, more streamlined access to their doctor as well as reduction in telephone tag. The Portal has enabled an increase in physician and staff efficiency, a better optimized workflow and a 25 percent reduction in telephone calls. In addition, with 70 percent of patients using the Portal, Trinity Family Medicine is well on its way to meeting goals for Meaningful Use 2.

"In the future the Portal will be even more integrated with others parts of the patient's chart," states Dr. Boyle. "Patients who need to take their blood sugar or vital signs at home send me the results over the Portal. Now after I review the information, I manually put it in the patient's chart. In future versions of MEDENT, the information will go directly into the chart."

"The role of the Portal will continue to expand. The use of MEDENT Mobile will increase as more patients records information from their phone, such as patients today with skin lesions who send me photographs to show how healing is progressing. Technology such as Skype and Google and pictures will enable more in healthcare to be done electronically. In some instances, patients won't need to come to the office."