

Case study

Amherst Medical Associates

Located in Amherst, New York, Amherst Medical Associates is a primary care group staffed by two family practice physicians who see patients from infancy to age 18 and three primary care physicians who see patients over 18. Serving 500 to 550 patients a week, six full-time and one part-time nurse assist the physicians, perform procedures and triage phone calls. Total staff is 25. In 2011, Amherst Medical achieved Meaningful Use and NCQA certification as a Level 3 Patient-Centered Medical Home.

“The major way patients use the Patient Portal is to look at lab results, schedule their own appointments and update their family history,” explains Dr. David Hartman, physician and co-founder, Amherst Medical Associates. “The Portal has made physicians, nurses and administrative staff more efficient, and patient reaction has been positive. With the Portal, I know whether patients have viewed their test results. Also, I can read and reply to a patient’s message in the same time it would take to make a phone call, but avoid phone tag.”

CHALLENGES

Amherst Medical Associates was founded in 2003 by Dr. David Hartman and the four full-time physicians who currently staff the practice. They wanted a single system for EMR and appointment scheduling and chose MEDENT Practice Management and EMR from Community Computer Service. By 2010, they wanted to implement a patient portal that was tightly integrated with their EMR.

SOLUTION

In September, 2010, Amherst Medical Associates began use of the MEDENT Patient Portal.

“The Portal has made scheduling of appointments more efficient, and there has been a dramatic reduction in phone calls.”

Kelly Baker, MEDENT Specialist
Amherst Medical Associates

Amherst Medical Associates uses the Lab Results Clearinghouse and MEDENT's Point and Click DocGens technology. Amherst Medical's EKG and pulmonary function machine are directly integrated with MEDENT. The physicians use e-prescribing and the associated drug alert, drug-drug interaction and drug-allergy capabilities.

"With MEDENT, information is available," states Dr. Hartman. "We can immediately learn whether a particular lab test has been done, avoiding duplicating tests. We can easily find results of the last colonoscopy or EKG, and we can learn if another provider has seen the patient. Kelly recalls that in a previous office with paper charts they would need to go to the file cabinet, get the chart and review it until they found the information needed. "Now information is at our fingertips," adds Kelly.

"We use MEDENT's Disease Management (DM) formulas for mammograms, influenza, colonoscopies and pneumovax," states Kelly. "Also, we run DM tracking reports for each physician to identify patients who need preventative care follow-up."

In 2011, Amherst Medical Associates achieved Meaningful Use. "It's done, it's achieved, we've submitted, and it's all taken care of," states Dr. Hartman. "As of February, we also became certified by NCQA as a Level 3 Patient-Centered Medical Home. While achieving Meaningful Use probably would have been possible without an EMR, I believe that you almost have to have an EMR to achieve Level 3 certification. Certainly it's easier, quicker and less labor intensive."

Amherst Medical Associates began using the Patient Portal in September 2010. "Tight integration of the Portal with the MEDENT system is very important," states Dr. Hartman. "With MEDENT, Portal messages go directly into the patient's chart. There is no toggling from screen to screen and no cut and paste."

Physicians introduce the Portal to selected patients at the end of the visit. The physician explains that the portal service is available and provides information to enable the patient to use the Portal. By October, 2011 about 30 percent of Amherst Medical's patients were using the Portal.

"The major way patients use the Portal is to look at lab results, schedule their own appointments and update their family history," states Dr. Hartman. "They also use it to request refills and to message the practice for routine issues. Patients are told to call if they need a response before 24 hours. The Portal is not monitored, and physicians typically look at messages one or two times a day."

"Patient reaction to the Portal has been positive," continues Dr. Hartman. "The addition of the MEDENT video tutorial has lessened the difficulty some patients had in using it initially. The Portal benefits patients in that a patient can send a message and then go about their day instead of calling on the phone and being placed on hold. Staff let the patient know via message that the matter has been taken care of. Also, if I've made an adjustment to their medication, I can send a note through the Portal about what to do. The patient can send a message and

get back a reply. Some patients even use their smart phones. The Portal gets rid of phone tag.”

“I like the Portal. I believe it makes me more efficient. For example, with lab results available on the Portal, I am able to learn whether and when results have been viewed. It’s better than having a nurse call. Also, it frees up the nurses time. They don’t have to print a letter and stuff and stamp an envelope. Now they can concentrate on practice management.”

“Our overall experience with Community Computer has been positive,” states Dr. Hartman. “Support staff get back to us by e-mail or phone if there’s an issue, and they listen to our concerns. When we integrated the pulmonary function machine to MEDENT, Community Computer provided phone training.”

RESULTS

The most significant way the MEDENT system has impacted Amherst Medical Associates is that information is easily and immediately available. The tight integration of the Portal with MEDENT EMR has been critical to physicians’ use of it. The Portal has increased the efficiency of physicians, nurses and administrative staff, and patient reaction has been positive.

“Some physicians thought the Portal might end up being more work but actually it has made them more efficient,” comments Kelly, “and there has been a dramatic reduction in phone calls, in the range of 20 percent.”

“In the future we want to get more patients active on the Portal,” states Dr. Hartman. “Initially we selected patients who were computer literate and not likely to abuse the system through excess use. We’re more comfortable now and will introduce the Portal to additional patients.”