

# Multiple Ways of Generating Notes Has Meant Legible, Complete Documentation

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With high transcription costs and illegible, incomplete documentation, The Arthritis Group wanted an electronic medical records (EMR) system that would provide multiple ways of generating notes. MEDENT EMR from Community Computer Service provided the flexibility in note taking the practice sought. Today The Arthritis Group is completely paperless. Information in patient records is legible and complete. Its quality and accessibility have improved dramatically. Plus, the practice has become much more efficient in such areas as prescription writing.

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## Situation

Founded in the mid 80's, The Arthritis Group is a sub-speciality practice which provides rheumatology consultation, in-office infusion and lab studies. With two physicians, two nurses and seven support staff, the practice treats approximately 225 adult patients a week from its main office in Philadelphia and from two satellite offices located in nearby suburbs.

Dr. Bruce Hoffman, who joined the practice in 1993, states, "Some of the biggest challenges facing us today include insurance reimbursement, recruitment of another physician and changing demographics." In the future, The Arthritis Group expects to establish an additional office to meet needs in one of Philadelphia's rapidly growing suburbs. To do so, the practice needs to hire another physician.

Through the 90's, The Arthritis Group used an incomplete electronic billing system, which meant that they still performed a lot of processes using paper such as ledger cards. When they began looking for a more complete system, they knew that they eventually wanted to move to electronic medical records (EMR). Therefore, a key requirement was that the vendor who provided billing software be able to provide the practice with an integrated EMR in the future. The Arthritis Group selected MEDENT billing from Community Computer Service and began using it in 2000. Previously, the practice had had only one office PC. Now they put PC's at each station. Their move toward a paperless office had begun.

"We wanted an EMR system that allowed ease of patient note taking and communication with referring physicians," explains Dr. Hoffman. "We wanted a system that provided multiple ways of generating notes." The Arthritis Group also wanted a system which would provide adequate documentation for billing and for any review of level of service. Legibility was a major concern as well in that reading the handwriting in patient records was difficult and sometimes impossible. At the time, the practice also wanted to contain its transcriptions costs which were very high.

## Solution

In April of 2002, The Arthritis Group began using MEDENT EMR. “One of the major reasons we chose MEDENT was its flexibility in note taking,” states Dr. Hoffman. “It provided a number of ways to generate notes, which was not true of other systems .” With the move to EMR, the practice got laptops, scanning equipment, more telephone lines and a new main server.

The Arthritis Group uses the MEDENT point and click DocGens technology and the Lab Results Clearinghouse for communication with one of their labs. They use faxing and scanning with the other. The practice scans all documents into the system and they use the MEDENT voice recording system. They submit claims electronically and use Community Computer’s Electronic Patient Statements service.

The Arthritis Group’s physicians try to document the patient visit when they are with the patient. “When the visit is fairly routine, I’m able to use templates and point and click and I’m able to complete documentation before I leave the room,” explains Dr. Hoffman. “If I need to do more typing, such as for a complex assessment, then typically I complete my notes between appointments.” The physicians look up patient history and trends as they talk to the patient and find that patients are often really impressed when they see information that has been scanned into the system.

Physicians have been able to achieve a huge increase in efficiency in prescription writing. While with the patient, they use their laptops to write prescriptions. They use electronic signature to sign the prescription and then hand it to the patient. While in some states such as New York, electronically signed prescriptions must be faxed to the pharmacy, in Pennsylvania the patient can present the prescription directly to the pharmacist.

“Our experience with Community Computer has been very good, “ states Dr. Hoffman. “They’ve been responsive and they keep improving the system, making changes that have been very useful. We’ve been pleased at how well all of the MEDENT modules work together.”

## Benefits

The most significant way in which MEDENT EMR has impacted The Arthritis Group is that they now have no paper charts. They have become completely paperless.

EMR has enabled the practice to become more efficient in a number of areas, and the quality of patient information has improved. The physicians have achieved major efficiencies in prescription writing. The appointment system is better and electronic transmission has sped the lab test process. Information in patient records is legible and complete, and it definitely fulfills what is needed to verify level of service. Plus, patient information is readily accessible to both physicians and office staff.

The Arthritis Group’s staff enter triage notes directly into the system rather than scribble them on paper as they did before they had EMR. Notes no longer get lost as they sometimes did in the past.

“We’re able to look up information as we talk to people,” explains Dr. Hoffman.. “We can see a patient’s drug history and allergies and the reason we stopped prescribing one drug and moved to another. We can look at lab results and spot trends over time.”

“We’ve been able to improve patient care because record keeping is better and access to information is better,” states Dr. Hoffman. “The MEDENT system has improved documentation tremendously.”