

Customized Templates and Point and Click Speed Documenting of Patient Visits

Published: November, 2004

Dermatology Associates of Crystal Run wanted to make note taking faster. Also, they wanted to reduce the space needed to store paper records and enable multiple people to access patient information at the same time. Going to MEDENT EMR from Community Computer Service has enabled both physicians and office staff to become more efficient and productive. Physicians are able to document patient visits using customized templates and point and click. They can better manage their schedules, and charges are no longer lost.

Situation

With four physicians, four medical assistants and 12 office staff, Dermatology Associates at Crystal Run provides general, surgical and cosmetic dermatology to patients ranging from newborns to 100. Located in Middletown, New York, with a small satellite office about 15 miles to the west, Dermatology Associates sees approximately 500 patients a week.

Some of the biggest challenges the practice faces today are keeping up with insurance changes, staying current with new medical advances and adjusting to different patient demographics. The practice struggles both to maintain an actively growing practice and to keep patients and staff satisfied. Dr. Jay Weitzner, who joined Dermatology Associates in 1989, describes, “With schedules booked far in advance and patients needing to wait longer than we would like, we’ve tried to add another physician. So far, we haven’t been able to find one.”

Up until the early 90’s, Dermatology Associates used ledgers and a completely paper-based system for bookkeeping management and billing. When Medicare began to require that claims be submitted electronically, the physicians recognized that they truly needed an up-to-date practice management system. A local pediatric practice used MEDENT Practice Management from Community Computer. When Dermatology Associates compared offerings from various vendors, they concluded MEDENT was the best.

Dermatology Associates began using MEDENT for patient and insurance billing as well as overall practice management in 1991. They found that the staff time needed for bookkeeping and billing decreased by at least 25 percent. Also, they were able to significantly speed up and increase collections.

In the late 90’s and early 2000’s, Dr. Weitzner read various articles and catalogues which convinced him of the benefits of electronic medical records. Dermatology Associates wanted to make note taking faster. Also, they wanted to lessen the amount of space required to store paper records, and they wanted physicians and office staff to have access to patient information at the same time.

Solution

Having been extremely satisfied with the MEDENT Practice Management software, Community Computer's Electronic Patient Statements service, and the overall support they had received, Dermatology Associates didn't consider any other vendor when they decided to move to electronic medical records (EMR) in March, 2003.

With the implementation of MEDENT EMR, Dermatology Associates' physicians began using wireless notebooks. They use templates customized for their practice and the point and click DocGens technology to document patient visits. "Because it's so easy, we have tailored and made changes to templates ourselves," explains Dr. Weitzner. "I document routine follow-ups completely using point and click. When I do consultation notes, I use a template and point and click and then fill in some details. Directly from my notebook, I then fax my notes to the referring physician."

Dr. Weitzner has found the speech recognition capability in MEDENT very easy to train to understand. "I now never use dictation," comments Dr. Weitzner. "I use speech recognition any time I take a complex history."

Because the lab Dermatology Associates uses doesn't participate in the Lab Results Clearinghouse, communication with the lab is paper-based. However, they scan lab results in to patient records and expect to move to electronic communication in the future.

"Our experience with Community Computer has been phenomenal," states Dr. Weitzner. "If we've needed technical help, we have gotten it immediately. All the people have been very easy to work with, and they really work hard to ensure that the system fits our specific needs."

Dermatology Associates has found the training that accompanies the MEDENT system exceptional. "If more people need to be trained, the training people come back," explains Dr. Weitzner. Also, the fact that Community Computer provides, integrates and supports all the hardware, software and networking has meant that Dermatology Associates has never struggled with incompatibilities. "With MEDENT, the integration is so transparent, it's easy to take it for granted," comments Dr. Weitzner. "One forgets about the incompatibilities so often experienced between hardware and software."

Benefits

Going to EMR has enabled both physicians and office staff to become more efficient and productive. Physicians have been able to better manage their schedules, charges are not lost and the thoroughness of documentation has improved. Multiple staff can access patient information at the same time, and the information needs to be entered only once. Because charges get posted directly to the computer, Dermatology Associates no longer loses claims or misses deadlines.

"EMR has enabled us to get a better grip on physicians schedules, on a minute to minute basis," states Dr. Weitzner. "We can look at our schedule and see who has arrived, when they arrived and if someone has cancelled. This enables us to fill in gaps and use our time more efficiently. As doing electronic notes become more and more routine, I expect to be able to see more patients in a

given time span.”

Dermatology Associates has been able to improve patient care in that processes are more streamlined. “Our record keeping is more complete,” concludes Dr. Weitzner, “and we have access to all of the information about patients.” Physicians can quickly locate specific information about a patient, such as their allergies and the medication they take, and add any new information. They can also learn if other members of patient’s family are being seen in the practice and make any comparison which may be useful.

While Vioxx is not a medication Dermatology Associates’ physicians prescribe, the recall drew attention to the need in such a situation to be able to identify all patients on a specific medication and contact them. “I read an article about how a practice had struggled to get letters out to patients on Vioxx,” comments Dr. Weitzner. “I realized that with MEDENT, we could quickly identify patients on a specific med and quickly get letters out to those patients. It would make an otherwise almost impossible job, possible.”