Going Paperless Has Dramatically Reduced Storage and Improved Retrieval

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Providing urgent care services to an average of 32 patients a day, 362 days of the year, Immediate Med Care Associates found their paper charts required huge storage space. Plus, locating patient information when it was needed was frequently a problem. With MEDENT EMR from Community Computer, Immediate Med Care has become entirely paperless. They no longer worry about losing records, not being able to retrieve notes from a previous patient encounter or finding additional space for paper files.

Situation

Immediate Med Care Associates, located in Camillus, New York, provides urgent care services seven days a week, 362 days a year. On average the practice sees 32 patients a day. Patients range in age from zero to 100 and seek urgent care for anything from an acute ear infection to a sprained ankle. The full-time staff of Immediate Med Care consists of two physicians, two nurses, an office manager and two secretaries. Part-time physicians and nurses are used to supplement staff, making it possible for full-time staff to take time off, such as for vacations, while enabling the practice to remain open seven days a week.

Founded in 1997 by Dr. Alan Ungaro and Dr. Robert Felter, one of the biggest challenges the practice faces is collecting payments from insurance companies. "Sometimes insurance companies delay making payment for unexplained reasons," explains Dr. Ungaro. "Also, the environment of increased malpractice claims makes the practice of medicine less fun than in years past."

Immediate Med Care began using MEDENT billing and practice management about seven years ago. While administrative staff loved the ease of use and speed with which they could get tasks done, to maintain patient records the practice continued to generate about 100,000 pieces of paper a year. With regulations requiring that adults' medical records be kept for seven years and children's records be kept until they reach age 21, Immediate Med Care found storage space an increasing problem. Also, legibility of physicians' handwriting and difficulty finding charts sometimes meant that the physician seeing a patient had minimal or no background information, even though the patient had been seen at the facility previously.

To address storage and retrieval concerns, Dr. Ungaro and Dr. Felter concluded they had to move to electronic medical records.

Solution

In March, 2004, Immediate Med Care began using MEDENT electronic medical records (EMR). At that time they also began using portable wireless notebook computers and got a new main server. Immediate Med Care was actually up and using the EMR system before the Community Computer Services trainer conducted training. "It was very easy to begin using MEDENT EMR since we're all quite computer savvy and MEDENT is very user friendly," comments Dr. Ungaro. "Many of our part-time staff, who have less experience with computers, also learned the system quickly."

Dr. Ungaro and Dr. Felter document the patient encounter while they are with the patient. They use all areas of the MEDENT progress notes as well as the point and click Doc Gens technology to simplify and speed creation of documentation. Also, they make use of the Medical Content Library for urgent care practices and the Lab Results Clearinghouse to automate the lab test process. The physicians use electronic signature to authorize tests and for prescriptions which are to be faxed to the pharmacy.

Immediate Med Care submits claims to insurance companies electronically. They also use Community Computer's Electronic Patient Statements service. "Patients' insurance cards are scanned into the system," explains Dr. Ungaro, "as is any other information collected on paper or on x-ray." Once the information is stored electronically, the x-rays and paper are shredded and destroyed. Within a couple of weeks of implementing EMR, Immediate Med Care had become entirely paperless.

"Our experience with Community Computer has been very good," states Dr. Ungaro, "and the MEDENT product is excellent. It's a great system and it's very stable." Immediate Med Care finds the Community Computer staff very accessible and helpful. "The fact that Community Computer provides all the software, hardware, networking and support is very valuable," continues Dr. Ungaro. "There's no finger pointing. We've had no major problems, but they respond quickly to anything we've needed."

Benefits

Moving to EMR and becoming entirely paperless has significantly reduced storage and dramatically improved retrieval of patient information. "We no longer worry about losing records, not being able to read notes from a patient encounter or finding space for huge paper files," comments Dr. Ungaro. "Also, the quality of documentation has improved dramatically."

Most of the benefits of MEDENT Practice Management were realized seven years ago when it was implemented. However, administrative staff are very happy with the addition of EMR because they save time on patient calls since they can quickly retrieve any information they need.

With EMR, all patient information is documented clearly and legibly in patient records. When a patient is seen by a physician other than the one they saw originally, the new physician can quickly retrieve information on the patient and the previous encounter. There's also less concern about audits by organizations such as Medicare and the huge loss of revenue that can occur as the result of an audit. "If a patient encounter is not legibly documented, Medicare considers billing for the

encounter fraudulent," explains Dr. Ungaro. "With MEDENT EMR, I no longer worry about audits as I did in the past."

With paper charts, if a patient record has been misfiled even by one character, it's basically lost because it can't be found when it's needed. "With EMR, we no longer lose files," states Dr. Ungaro. "Patient care has improved because we now have an overview and history readily available when the patient is seen."