

Connecting to Patient Information from Anywhere Has Resulted in Greater Efficiency and Quality of Care

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After struggling with a billing system and an EMR with limited functionality, Northeast Nephrology Associates decided to implement MEDENT Practice Management and EMR from Community Computer Service. The practice is now able to connect to patient information from anywhere, be more efficient, better document patient visits and provide higher quality of care. The flow of information in the office has dramatically improved, and fewer administrative staff are needed.

Situation

Located in Troy, New York, Northeast Nephrology Associates provides internal medicine for adult kidney patients. In an average week, the practice administers dialysis to 150 patients, sees 90 patients on an out-patient basis and completes 120 patient visits at the local hospitals. Providers include two physicians and one nurse practitioner. In addition, the practice has four full-time and four part-time staff, including two registered nurses and a patient care technician. Soon a third physician will join the group.

Northeast Nephrology Associates was founded in 1978 by a physician who retired from medicine in 1995. Dr. Leslie Goldstein joined the practice in 1984. He is now president and co-owns the practice with Dr. Darshan Arora.

“The biggest challenge facing the practice is keeping up with the paperwork and providing adequate documentation in the office and at the hospital,” states Dr. Goldstein. “Another challenge is to keep afloat with diminishing reimbursements. While the practice has been growing, overhead has kept going up and income has been flat due to lower reimbursements.”

In the 1990s, two full-time people and one half-time person conducted Northeast Nephrology’s billing using the Versys billing system. Because the Versys system did not adequately meet their needs and local support was insufficient, the practice changed to MEDENT Practice Management in 2000. “The staff really loved MEDENT’s auto-posting,” describes Dr. Goldstein, “and in six months my billing people came to me and said they could do billing with one less person. The savings easily paid for the system.”

Northeast Nephrology Associates had begun using the QD Clinical EMR system in 1994. While overall the system worked well, they were frustrated because of its limited functionality. For example, providers weren’t able to easily access the system remotely or fax prescriptions. Also, reliability was an issue.

Solution

In 2004, Northeast Nephrology decided to go to MEDENT EMR and use a single system for everything. “In about six months we were very comfortable with the EMR,” states Dr. Goldstein. “I was entirely paperless by January, 2005, and within a few months the other providers followed.”

When the practice went to MEDENT EMR they upgraded their PCs and connected the computers in the exam rooms to the Internet. They also bought scanners and fax servers and upgraded their main server to achieve greater security and dependability. Today Northeast Nephrology uses the Electronic Patient Statements service from Community Computer to create and mail patient statements. They do electronic submission of claims and use the Lab Results Clearinghouse. In addition, they take pictures of every patient so staff can look in the EMR and confirm or connect with a face.

Dr. Goldstein likes MEDENT’s lab capability because information is immediately available in the correct field and can be graphed on a time axis to understand patterns. “Often I use graphs in my interaction with patients,” explains Dr. Goldstein. “We look together at how their kidney functioning or blood pressure has changed over time, and I print the graph for the patient to take home.” Also, Dr. Goldstein frequently prints out educational information for patients from Up-To-Date (www.uptodate.com), an Internet-based medical website which provides information for physicians and patients. Dr. Goldstein then copies the link and puts it in the patient notes for future reference.

Northeast Nephrology has scanned in thousands of old charts, with some going back 15-20 years. Rather than simply scan in what can easily be over 100 pages, they put the information into various categories and select only the information that is needed to understand the history of the patient’s disease. For example, renal transplant patients have blood work done every month, but for blood work older than two years, the practice includes results from only one month of each year.

Dr. Goldstein describes his overall experience with Community Computer as very favorable. “The training people and technical people are very good,” states Dr. Goldstein. “Response to immediate problems is within 45 minutes, and questions are answered in a thorough and timely manner. Requests for additional functionality usually appear in the next version.”

Benefits

MEDENT has enabled Northeast Nephrology to connect to information from anywhere, be more efficient, better document patient visits and improve patient care. The flow of information in the office has dramatically improved and they now need fewer administrative staff.

When Dr. Goldstein is making rounds at the hospital and wants to look up patient information, he can immediately access the information via the internet. If his previous day ended without finishing his notes, the next morning he goes into triage from home and everything he needs to complete his notes is there.

Dr. Goldstein believes that with MEDENT EMR he is more efficient. He doesn’t need to process

information multiple times. For example, when a patient is discharged from the hospital, he updates the medicine list on his system and faxes two copies to the hospital, one for the chart and one for the patient. At the same time, he faxes the prescriptions to the floor or directly to the patient's pharmacy. Legibility of the prescription is assured and the fact that it was generated by MEDENT allows secure tracking and logging.

“Before the practice became paperless, there were long delays in reviewing labs and studies and getting them filed expeditiously,” explains Dr. Goldstein. The process of requesting the chart from the file room, reviewing the information and sending it back to the front office often took two to three days. With EMR, the information turnaround time is almost instantaneous. Lab results are immediately scanned or faxed directly into the system, and the chart is triaged to the provider for review. “I can accomplish things faster and more reliably,” states Dr. Goldstein. “No charts are lost or data misplaced. Having information at your finger tips from anywhere improves patient care.”

Dr. Goldstein expects to use MEDENT's new disease management (DM) formulas and tracking reports in the months ahead. “It's where insurance companies and Medicare are going in quality of care and outcomes management,” concludes Dr. Goldstein. “The new capabilities are amazingly powerful and will simplify care of our patients.”