

With Paper Charts Retired, Efficiency and Quality of Care Have Improved

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MEDENT Practice Management and EMR from Community Computer Service has enabled Suburban Psychiatric Associates to completely retire paper charts. Four new provider offices now occupy what was formerly the medical records room and billing. The number of administrative employees has decreased over 40 percent. The practice has been able to increase efficiency, streamline getting messages to providers and improve the quality and continuity of care. Providers spend less time on non-patient contact activity, see more patients and better stay on schedule.

Situation

Located in West Amherst, New York, Suburban Psychiatric Associates provides psychiatric services to patients from age six to 80. Twenty full-time providers and one part-time provider see 700 to 750 patients a week. Professional staff consist of nine psychiatrists, two nurse practitioners, four psychologists and six social workers. The practice has 13 administrative employees, plus a financial manager and a practice manager.

Four current partners, Dr. Daniel Willis, Dr. Christopher Martin, Dr. Andrew Reichert and Dr. Michael Hallett, were part of the initial group which founded Suburban Psychiatric Associates in 1996. The practice began using MEDENT Practice Management from Community Computer Services in 1998. The system enabled them to be sure they had correct insurance information, to file claims and to manage billing.

“Overall, we’re on top of things, and the practice runs smoothly,” states Lisa Peinkofer, practice manager. “We’ll have a bit of a challenge in the months ahead with Timothy’s Law and changes in the number of visits per year paid by insurance, but we’ll manage it fine.”

Solution

Suburban Psychiatric started using MEDENT EMR in December, 2004. They got a new server, a high-end scanner, an insurance card scanner, and they upgraded their PCs. They scanned in to the EMR all of their existing charts and sent the paper charts off to storage.

Currently, they use Community Computer’s service for the creation and mailing of electronic patient statements. The practice submits claims electronically and uses the point & click DocGens technology for the creation of progress notes and other reports, letters and documents. They use document scanning and image storage, and two providers use speech recognition.

Currently Suburban Psychiatric has no physical charts in the office because for over two years all new patient charts have been electronic. “We access three or four charts a week from outside

storage to get specific information which wasn't scanned in, such as for a court date or Social Security," explains Lisa, "but the chart then immediately goes back to storage."

Prior to full implementation of EMR, Suburban Psychiatric had 22 administrative employees. Today they have 13. "We no longer need employees to pull charts," states Lisa. "By combining jobs, creating different jobs and through attrition, we only had to lay off two people." The space formerly used for the medical records room and billing has enabled them to create four additional provider offices. At the same time, Suburban Psychiatric increased collections and decreased 180-day-old receivables.

"With all staff connected to the MEDENT system, communication among staff is better," comments Lisa. "For providers there is a decreased amount of non-patient contact activity. One of the reasons for this is that for routine patient questions, administrative employees can quickly look up the information in the chart without questioning the provider." Providers have been able to see more patients and better stay on schedule.

"The thoroughness of documentation has improved in that providers are forced to ask certain questions," states Lisa. "There is more unified care because everyone does the same type of progress note." Providers can open progress notes quickly, and they are better able to locate specific information. For example, if a patient calls and their physician is not reachable, another physician can access the progress notes from their computer and learn what they need to know to respond to the patient.

Providers use touch screen notebooks, and the majority document the patient visit while with the patient. Before EMR, providers would write out prescriptions on paper. Now prescriptions are entered electronically and go directly to the pharmacy before the patient leaves the office. Patients like the new way since they no longer have to take the prescription to the pharmacy and wait for it to be filled. Physician follow-up is also easier in that they can easily pull-up medication information to see what the patient is currently taking.

Administrative employees have become more efficient. They can access information without getting up and pulling the chart or tracking down the provider to learn the needed information. If someone calls about a chart or an account, the employee can access it immediately. If a patient calls and wants to leave a message for their provider, the message can be immediately triaged to the provider. "There is much less room for error, and patient collection is better," describes Lisa. "One reason collection is better is that administrative employees are in a smaller area and there is better communication." The person who does billing and the person checking out patients are now in close proximity.

"Our overall experience with Community Computer has been excellent," states Lisa. "We're very pleased with the service they provide. They always have answers to questions and call back quickly. They're very professional and well-informed. If need be, they dial-in to our system to see directly what's wrong."

Community Computer has done specific programming to meet the needs of Suburban Psychiatric. "Our progress notes are unique," describes Lisa. "They're not the same as those used in any other

office.”

Benefits

MEDENT has impacted Suburban Psychiatric in numerous ways including decreasing the cost of records management, increasing efficiency, streamlining getting messages to providers and improving the quality and continuity of care.

Four new provider offices now occupy the space once used for medical records and billing. The number of administrative employees needed has decreased over 40 percent, from 22 to 13. Costs have decreased, and revenue has increased. Administrative employees can access the information they need from their computers without getting up to pull a chart or track down a provider. Providers spend less time on non-patient contact activity and are able to see more patients and better stay on schedule.

Documentation is more thorough and consistent, making it easier for providers to locate information on their patients or on another provider’s patient, should that be necessary. Prescriptions are written electronically and go directly to the pharmacy, reducing a patient’s wait.