

Physician Productivity Has Increased 20-30%, and Lab Results Are Handled Over 85% More Efficiently

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Western New York Urology Associates needed better billing and electronic scheduling. They wanted a vendor who could provide strong local support, deliver on the promise of EMR, and take them into the future. Community Computer Service and its MEDENT Practice Management and EMR solution have filled the bill. Day-to-day operations run smoother and more efficiently. WNY Urology Associates is able to provide quality services to greater numbers of patients, and lab results typically are handled in one day versus 7-10 days with paper. Plus, payment of insurance claims has improved significantly.

Situation

With 18 nurses and one part-time and 10 full-time physicians, Western New York Urology Associates treats an average of 2,000 patients a week. They operate from six locations in and around Buffalo, New York, with offices in both the Northtowns and Southtowns areas.

WNY Urology Associates treats patients with a wide variety of problems within its speciality of urology. Treatment may include surgery and/or drug therapy. Today the practice prides itself on being state-of-the-art in clinical care as well as in the information systems which support the organization.

One of the biggest challenges the practice faces is to keep things organized and consistent at the patient level while dealing with a large organization spread over multiple locations. Another challenge is to make things work economically during a time of continuing cut-backs in chemotherapy reimbursements. The cut-backs have significantly impacted WNY Urology Associates because of the extensive work they do in urological oncology.

In the early 90's, WNY Urology Associates faced a cash flow crisis. They were experiencing long delays in reimbursement from Medicare due to problems with the software they were using. Calyx, the national company who provided their software, had fragmented local support and efforts to solve the problem were unsuccessful. WNY Urology Associates needed to solve the immediate problem. They also needed better systems to support day-to-day operations such as patient billing and electronic scheduling. And they wanted a system which would support them into the future.

Richard Terhaar, WNY Urology Associates Practice Administrator, recognized the tremendous value electronic medical records (EMR) could provide for the practice. Rick explains, "EMR was in a very early stage at that time. It was more a promise than a reality." WNY Urology Associates sought a vendor whose promise to deliver EMR was credible and who could provide strong local support.

Solution

In January, 1993, WNY Urology Associates purchased MEDENT from Community Computer Services (CCS). Rick explains, “We looked at the software of many vendors, and none came close to MEDENT. We were confident CCS had not only the best software but that they were the best company to align ourselves with for the future.” Along with the MEDENT Practice Management modules, WNY Urology Associates initially added a new server and new networking, while continuing to use dumb terminals.

In mid 1994, WNY Urology Associates began to use a beta version of MEDENT EMR. Later, with full implementation of scanning and image storage, they completely got rid of their paper charts. Today WNY Urology Associates uses every MEDENT module, including the Lab Results Clearinghouse. This module provides electronic transmission and automatic routing of lab information to and from the lab which processes the practice’s lab tests. WNY Urology Associates uses desktop PCs, palm pilots with PDA, and wireless touch screen ultra light notebook computers, which enable physicians to access patient information from their homes.

“I’ve come to greatly respect CCS’s approach over the years,” states Rick. “They’re very careful about growth, and they take on only one or two new territories a year because each local area has payer idiosyncrasies. CCS provides us with excellent support. If there’s a problem anywhere in the system, CCS has the expertise to remedy the problem. There’s no finger pointing to another vendor.”

Rick continues, “People sometimes think of national companies as being more stable, but their level of commitment is not as strong as that of CCS. Plus, personnel at national companies tend to turn over on a regular basis. The CCS owners are passionate about the quality of the solution they provide. They live, eat and breathe MEDENT.”

Benefits

Using MEDENT, day-to-day operations at WNY Urology Associates run smoothly and efficiently. There have been significant benefits in both the clinical area and the economic area. They’ve been able to provide high quality services to greater numbers of patients, process lab results much faster and speed-up payment of insurance claims.

Rick explains, “When a physician sees a patient, he makes a decision based on the information at hand and his knowledge base. With EMR, it’s possible to provide more and better information. Quality of service is negatively impacted when there are incomplete records.” Using EMR, a clinician doesn’t need to search the paper chart and telephone messages to learn the last patient contact, the result of a specific lab test or the history for a particular symptom.

From an economic perspective, WNY Urology Associates has found that physicians can see more patients. Rich explains, “EMR enables physicians to see the same number of patients with less human effort or greater numbers of patients with the same human effort. We’ve found physician

productivity gains are in the range of 20-30%.”

“Payment of insurance claims has gone from 40-45 days to 28-32 days, and using MEDENT’s Lab Results Clearinghouse is over 85% more efficient than paper,” states Rick. With the old paper system, often it took 7-10 days from the time the lab result was received to the time staff had follow-up orders back from the physician. With the electronic system, it’s typically all done in the same day.

As soon as the lab result comes in, regardless of the physician’s location, he receives an alert on the MEDENT main screen that a new lab result is waiting. With a few clicks, he reviews the result as well as graphs with past results, to identify trends. The physician clicks to see anything else in the patient’s chart he wants to review. He then creates a triage right from the lab order, and types or dictates a voice note on what he wants done. The staff gets the triage electronically and handles it immediately.

With MEDENT EMR, patient information is available to WNY Urology Associates’ physicians any time of day, regardless of their location. Rick concludes, “What was only a promise in the early 90’s is fully realized today.”