



Case Study

MediNotes in Practice



Dr. Frederic Blum *Turning Tedious Tasks into Easy Efficiency*

Nothing drives a doctor crazier than seeing staff wandering around the office searching for a chart. Our office had stacks of charts that needed to be filed. Sometimes charts were hard to find or were moved unknowingly within the office. If an insurance company needed a copy of a lab or pathology report for a claim, we would have to translate the note to paper and fax it to the insurance company. If we were to get a call that they lost or did not receive the fax, we would have to go through the lengthy process all over again. Our employees were wasting valuable time on these processes.

Triangle Dermatology Associates in Durham, North Carolina, is a four doctor practice with three offices in the surrounding area. Each doctor sees upwards of 40 patients a day, totaling 160 patients a day if all four offices are running, with seven nurses combined. We try to run an efficient office but the process of charting was dragging us down.

Our paper charts were housed in a 14x16 medical records room and were spilling over into an exam room. We still have charts from our practice that are 40 years old, and that format is completely different from the newer charts, making it confusing for doctors and staff to go back and forth between the old and the new. In addition, we were tired of trying to track down charts and not being able to read notes that were handwritten in a hurry.

Implementing electronic health records

We decided to automate our paper charts by implementing an EHR. We researched systems for a year. We talked with colleagues, searched the Internet, went to trade shows, and even traveled to see systems in use. When we found MediNotes e, an EHR by MediNotes Corporation, we knew we had found the system for us.

We liked how MediNotes e handled graphics because using pictures to chart patient progress is a large part of what we do. For example, it is important to track the progression of a wound in order to properly treat it. By using a digital camera and inputting the photograph directly into the patient's chart, we can monitor the progression of a skin case throughout time of treatment in a neat, organized way.

We were impressed that MediNotes e offers User Groups and listens to customer feedback. They are committed to making MediNotes e even better than it already is. With the flexibility the program offers, the question is not, "Can it solve my problem?", but, "In which way do I want to solve the problem?"

We have heard that some EHR systems take over a year to implement. We implemented the system January 1, 2004, and within two months, we were able to write every note, print it, and put it in the chart. For a while we ran two systems parallel to each other, just to be sure. But with time, we decreased our dependence on the paper chart as we became assured that the MediNotes system was working. Each month our paper charts, and the amount of time we were dealing with charts, decreased.

Before we implemented, we decided to only scan in charts for office visits instead of scanning every chart that was archived from A to Z. This kept the cost of implementation to a minimum. No new charts were made for any new patients. We taught the nurses how to copy all insurance cards and scan them into the system, making this information easily accessible to our billing department.

We have PCs in our exam rooms as well as out in our office area. We don't want the computer to come between the patient and the doctor, so we made the decision to have our nurse start the note before the doctor goes into the exam room. The doctor uses that information during the visit. As the doctor is talking to the patient, he also talks to the nurse who is on the computer documenting new complaints and documenting the physical exam. The nurse also assists in writing prescriptions and printing out information sheets for the patient. Much of the note is already done when the patient leaves and we can easily finish and sign-off on the note with a few keystrokes.

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Exceeding Our Original Expectations

When we bought the system, our main goal was to eliminate our paper charts. We are well on our way just six months after implementation. In addition, we have achieved so much more from this system than we ever expected or imagined. We have improved our interoffice communications. Instead of pink telephone message pads and post-it notes, we use MediNotes e to remind ourselves of things we need to do and to communicate between doctors and staff. If I am covering for a doctor and find something interesting, I can leave a note and I know he is going to get it.

I have been shocked by how computer savvy my staff was. They have been able to teach the doctors a lot about how to use the system. We learn new things about our system daily, and we continually modify our use of it. There is a learning curve that is involved but we found that if we took it one step at a time, we could improve upon every system in the office.

Experiencing Savings in Many Areas

I now can access information with the click of a mouse. The patient's chart is always at my fingertips and I have much more control over my office and my time. Our work doesn't pile up and staff can sit at their desks and find information instead of running around the office trying to locate charts. When we had a paper system and I was out of the office, I was not able to respond to small, non-urgent questions as timely as I wanted to. Now I can answer any question from anywhere, and it usually takes less than an hour to get back to my staff, which in turn provides better customer service.

We eliminated one transcriptionist position which will save us approximately \$31,000 a year. This is the only position we eliminated, and our staff members feel secure in their jobs with MediNotes e. We are all enjoying our jobs more, with less overtime needed in order to get things done. Before going electronic our staff would stay over for 45 minutes at the end of the day for filing. We are now saving 10 hours a week on filing charts. And the staff can devote their time to better patient care instead of "paper care." They get to go home on time, and we are saving the cost of overtime.

Although the doctors still spend as much time as before with writing notes, we have better, very detailed notes that explain exactly what happened on the visit, including which handouts were given, and what side effects were explained to the patient.

We have virtually eliminated the paper chart that was taking up so much space, and cut back on paper supplies. We are saving \$5,000 to \$10,000 a year for chart materials alone. We have eliminated one chart rack already; we have almost cleared our overflow room of charts and expect to reclaim it for examinations very soon.

We use electronic prescription writing for faster turn-around time on prescriptions. We have a system that ensures the right prescription will be filled with every prescription typewritten and legible. We are saving time by printing out referral letters and getting these letters to the referring doctors so much quicker than with our paper system. We print out the detailed notes of the visit and that is usually all that is needed. Our referring doctors have noticed our improved efficiency.

In addition to improving upon itself, MediNotes' support department accepts e-mail with suggestions and we tell them what is going on and what we are using it for. We want to eventually have other dermatologists in the area who are in our network, use MediNotes e so we can connect with them and have focus group sessions to share and trade ideas.

MediNotes e helped us solve not only problems we were experiencing in our office, but also things we did not realize or imagine could be improved. We can access key information with a mouse click. We have been able to streamline our daily routine and take the tedium out of our work. We could not have achieved our current level of efficiency without MediNotes e.

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