



Case Study

MediNotes in Practice

Automating My Practice Exceeded My Expectations

by John Guiliana, DPM

When I decided to automate my patient records over seven years ago, I expected an increase in office efficiency, but the actual achievements have gone well beyond anything I could have ever imagined. We grew from one full-time and one part-time doctor to three, full-time doctors without additional support staff. We have reduced transcription costs by at least \$25,000 every year. We are able to take digital photographs of the patient's progress and capture those photos in the chart. We respond to referrals with letters that are sent even before the patient checks out, causing primary care physicians to visit our office to see how we can be so efficient with no extra support staff.

All of this has been possible because of MediNotes e , an electronic health record (EHR) by MediNotes Corporation. MediNotes is extremely affordable and easy to use, yet its level of sophistication provides features not found in more expensive products.

Practice Needed to Reduce Costs

Foot Care Associates, P.C., is a three-doctor podiatry practice in Hackettstown, New Jersey. We see approximately 400 patients per week in our main location and satellite office. In 1996, my practice was at a crossroads. I had a part-time associate and an increasing patient load. I had the typical one computer office. But due to managed care and declining reimbursements, I felt that we had hit a point of diminishing returns. It was obvious that I needed to reduce costs and automation seemed like the best solution available.

The bulk of our administrative expenses included payroll and transcription costs. It seemed logical to address those issues first, yet I realized that simply cutting staff without first optimizing work processes would adversely affect our quality of care.

Automating our patient records with an EHR would allow us to capture information at the point of the care. We could document a patient visit, sign and close the chart all at the same time, without the time normally needed to dictate, have someone transcribe, review the chart, edit the notes, review the transcription, sign the chart, and so forth. In addition, I felt that our records would be much more secure in an electronic, rather than paper, format. The chance of flood or fire, however remote, lurked in the back of my mind. Losing paper records would be devastating without having an electronic backup.

When I installed MediNotes e, I also purchased a practice management system for billing and scheduling. Now we have a personal computer in every treatment room. We make the diagnosis and enter the appropriate information into MediNotes e during the exam. Progress notes are completed, and referral letters are sent electronically, all from the exam room before patient leaves the office.

Easy to Learn EHR

MediNotes e is a user-friendly system that can easily reflect your own style and workflow without a lot of extra work on the part of the user. One of the key features of the product is that it documents by exception using a simple, pull-down menu method. While I am with a patient, I can quickly click on the chief complaint. A dialog box appears with the relevant choices to describe that particular type of complaint. If I want to change the templated language to match my workflow and my dictation methods, I just change it once, right in the exam room, and the change is permanent.

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AVS Medical
877 B&A Blvd. , Suite 211
Severna Park, MD 21146

Sales: 877.975.9160

E-mail: Lloyd@AVSMedical.com
Internet:
www.AVSMedical.com



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Digital Pictures in Patient Record

MediNotes e allows me to document patient visits - and their progress - with pictures. I use a digital camera to take pictures of the patient's ailment in the exam room. At each subsequent visit, more pictures are taken and entered into the patient's file. At a glance, I can see how the patient is progressing. This cutting-edge technology has been powerful in allowing Foot Care Associates to raise the bar of standards in patient care.

Increased Efficiencies and Overhead Savings

At the time I bought MediNotes e, I invested approximately \$15,000 for hardware and \$10,000 for software. I estimate that the system paid for itself in less than one year.

With an automated system, the patient chart is at our fingertips and accessible to authorized users with the click of a mouse. MediNotes e has decreased the time that we spend on sub-processes that are so time-consuming and expensive, such as pulling charts, hunting down lost charts, re-filing charts, pasting dictation into charts ... none of that is now necessary.

Even though my practice continued to grow, I didn't have to add employees for medical records maintenance. And a conservative estimate shows that we are saving at least \$40,000 a year overall. In addition to the \$25,000 in annual transcription savings, I estimate that we are saving \$10,000 in payroll for non-medical staff, and more than \$5,000 a year for the time we have saved in handling paper charts.

Secure Records

It is hard to explain the sense of well-being that automated records have given me. There are so many areas that are affected in a positive way by having electronic charts. For instance, MediNotes e helps us comply with HIPAA regulations. The security of the program ensures that only authorized medical personnel can access patient files, and the audit trail tracks every change made to the patient's medical record.

MediNotes e also provides a powerful security measure for disaster recovery, with a data backup feature that you can use with an external back up device of your choice. In our case, we use a Hewlett Packard tape storage system that backs up our data at midnight every day. The tapes are stored at someone's home, away from the office.

Image of Quality

It took about six months to really learn MediNotes e and get into the flow of the program. But the benefits far outweigh the efforts. The cost savings in our overhead alone would make it the right thing to do. But what it has done for our image in the community has been tremendous. The quick referral letter responses and the reviews from patients have resulted in a number of physicians visiting my office to see what we are doing. That kind of admiration is the icing on the cake.

John Guiliana, DPM, is the managing partner of Foot Care Associates, P.C. He is a speaker and author on healthcare management and holds a master's degree in healthcare management. He can be reached at footmds@aol.com.

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-mail: Lloyd@AVSMedical.com
rnet: www.AVSMedical.com