

Small practice quickly and easily implements integrated IT systems

Overview

Practice

Family practice in Bowling Green, Ohio

Business Problem

Wanted to open a practice that not only used an advanced practice management system, but also utilized electronic medical records. The physicians wanted to ensure that the systems could be implemented simultaneously, were easy to use and required minimal customization.

Solution

NextGen® EMR and NextGen® EPM

Product Distinctions

- ▶ Fast and easy implementation
- ▶ Ready-to-deploy primary care templates
- ▶ Content and functionality tailored for small practices
- ▶ Optimal code selection
- ▶ Revenue cycle management
- ▶ Simplified claims creation with full claims scrubbing

Benefits

- ▶ Better patient care and outcomes
- ▶ Effective use of human and financial resources
- ▶ Comprehensive charge capture and cost recovery
- ▶ Significant reduction of initial claims rejection
- ▶ Rapid return on investment

Beth Horrigan, MD, and Lisa Merrill, MD, took advantage of a rare opportunity in 2005 when they opened their own practice in Bowling Green, Ohio. Because they were starting from scratch, they made the bold decision to eschew paper processes altogether. Instead, they built the operational and clinical foundation of the practice—Bowling Green Family Physicians—using only the enterprise practice management (EPM) and electronic medical records (EMR) systems from NextGen Healthcare.

NextGen's out-of-the-box functionality made implementation easy and, although the investment in technology was significant, the systems quickly demonstrated enviable return on investment for this growing Midwestern practice.

Easy-to-implement system eliminates frustrations, delays of paper-based processes

After five years of working at the local hospital in Bowling Green, Dr. Horrigan made the decision in 2005 to partner with colleague Dr. Merrill and open a private primary care practice.

The physicians determined that adoption of a state-of-the-art practice management system was a "given" in order to support operational and administrative efficiency, and quickly made the corresponding decision to use an EMR. Both physicians had long worked in environments dependent upon paper charts and found the conventional approach frustrating.



“We are very pleased with how user-friendly the NextGen EMR is. The system offers a full menu of ready-to-use templates specifically for primary care practices, so we were up and running from day one.”

Beth Horrigan, MD
President

The biggest drawback to paper documentation was the lack of access to real-time patient care data. Traditionally, providers see a patient and dictate notes later in the day or week. The notes are then sent off for transcription and, after the dictation is returned, may sit in a pile waiting for the physician’s signature. This multi-step process results in a lag between the date of the encounter and the time when information is available to other staff. If, during this delay, the patient is seen in the office for a related or different problem, the physician is unable to review the most current medical information. This can result in delays in care, errors, and duplication of effort if tests or studies are inadvertently repeated.

In addition, reliance on paper charts often means the time spent with patients is used inefficiently. It is difficult to organize paper charts so that medication lists, summaries of chronic conditions, family histories and other information are easy to spot. Physicians often have to flip through multiple pages, interfering with the flow of the immediate encounter, and may even inadvertently refer to outdated information.

Internet research identifies top systems

Wanting to avoid these impediments to superior care, Bowling Green Family Physicians decided to implement an EMR with a practice management system as soon as it opened its doors. But first it had to find a system that would meet all of its needs.

To that end, the partners launched an exhaustive technology search. Their first stop was the Internet, where they used online tools to investigate various vendors and systems. One of their prime sources was the American Academy of Family

Physicians (AAFP), which features a health information technology section on its website. Drs. Horrigan and Merrill also visited specialty chat rooms to gather feedback from their small practice peers.

The pair then turned to physicians practicing in their area to discover who was adopting EMR systems, and which vendors were providing the level of technology and support they sought.

Based on the information they unearthed, the field was narrowed to three. Early in this process, they determined not to sacrifice high quality or functionality for price – deciding, instead, to make an investment that would support their growth and goals over the long term.

NextGen systems generate favorable return on investment

Bowling Green ultimately selected the NextGen systems because of the strength of the EPM package, and because the EMR content was pre-built for rapid implementation.

Although adoption of the NextGen systems represented a significant investment in terms of upfront costs and ongoing maintenance fees, Drs. Horrigan and Merrill anticipated a prompt and favorable ROI. NextGen EMR exhibited specific features that were lacking or immature in competitive systems, including: automated E/M coding to minimize chronic undercoding and underbilling; easy reporting of discrete data to support P4P participation and income; health maintenance alerts to increase patient visits; and high quality claims scrubbing to greatly reduce rejections.

When comparing the price of the technology to the cost of running a paperbased practice, the advantages of the EMR and EPM became quickly evident. Within two short years, Bowling Green Family Physicians has:

- ▶ Minimized staffing costs. Reliance on the EMR means the practice requires no staff to pull or file charts, and it incurs no transcription fees. The EPM allows the practice to operate efficiently with minimal billing staff while also optimizing the revenue stream.
- ▶ Improved charge capture by ensuring correct coding. The EMR supports correct code choices which is especially important in a primary care setting where physicians typically under-code E/M visits. This is a frequent occurrence because physicians may be unsure if their documentation would support code selection in case of an audit.
- ▶ Enhanced its revenue stream. NextGen EPM helps ensure optimal cost recovery and streamlines the entire revenue cycle. Bowling Green Family Physicians is better able to manage and process claims through HIPAA-compliant electronic transactions, and minimize write-offs due to claims rejections, underpayments or unpaid patient balances.

Applications prove easy to implement and use

After making their selection, Drs. Horrigan and Merrill began plans for immediate implementation of the NextGen systems – a daunting task,

since they would roll out the EPM and EMR simultaneously. Nevertheless, the process was nearly flawless, thanks to extensive training and support from NextGen. The practice was fully running both systems within four months of the initial contract signing.

Implementation of the EMR was exceptionally easy, the Bowling Green staff discovered, since the encounter-based templates came ready to use – the Knowledge Based Model (KBM) contains pre-built templates for “plug and play” functionality. This user-friendly approach meant that the Bowling Green staff was able to make full use of the system from Day One. NextGen EMR offers additional functionality through its Template Editor that allows the group to make changes or tailor specific templates whenever they choose, in order to meet unique practice needs.

NextGen supported Bowling Green Family Physicians’ implementation efforts by providing extensive training to one physician, as well as the office and billing managers, at its Pennsylvania facility. Implementation specialists also spent three days on-site with the practice to offer additional support. They shadowed clinical staff to provide trouble-shooting and problem-solving assistance. During the first day, NextGen representatives walked the providers through each visit, but hung back on the subsequent days and offered assistance only when asked. While the practice reduced the number of patient visits the first few days after implementation, they were handling the system on their own at full capacity within two weeks.



Front: Patty Noble, CFNP and Kelly Blickensderfer, CFNP **Back:** Beth Horrigan, MD and Lisa Merrill, MD



"The cost of implementing this technology is significant, but we were not going to sacrifice quality or functionality because of price. NextGen worked with us to provide the best pricing possible. Our decision began to pay off almost immediately and the ROI has been worth it."

Beth Horrigan, MD
President

Practice realizes favorable results

After two years on NextGen EMR and NextGen EPM, Bowling Green Family Physicians has been able to achieve operational efficiencies, while providing superior care to its patients.

In addition, it has encountered very few difficulties with the systems. The only interruption in use the practice experienced was related to hardware failure, causing the providers to rely on paper-based encounter notes for one day. These were quickly entered into the system when the hardware problem was resolved to ensure the EMR was up-to-date.

As part of its standard service package, NextGen Healthcare routinely monitors a number of key considerations on a remote basis – including daily data backup, available disc space and main processor usage. NextGen will automatically notify the practice if it sees or anticipates any problems.

Selection criteria

When selecting information technology to support a small practice, Drs. Horrigan and Merrill recommend:

- ▶ Selecting a reputable vendor that has demonstrated a commitment to developing innovative technology, and is equally dedicated to providing leading edge solutions in the future.
- ▶ Choosing systems that are easy to implement and use, and that provide functionality to optimize the practice's clinical and workflow processes.
- ▶ Ensuring that the system supports the practice's commitment to high-quality care, and provides the ability to access and analyze data to enhance care delivery.
- ▶ Relying upon a vendor that utilizes standard technologies, such as HL7 interfaces, discrete data and SQL server technology, to facilitate the easy exchange of clinical and administrative information.
- ▶ Selecting systems that are DOQ-IT and CCHIT certified, to ensure the practice's eventual participation in pay-for-performance programs.