

Wood River Family Practice Goes Paperless with EHR System, Improves Patient Care

At a Glance

Organization

Wood River Family Medicine
Blaine County, Idaho

- Multispecialty practice with offices in Hailey and Ketchum
- 18,000-patient service area
- Six physicians

Solution Spotlight

- Practice Partner® Appointment Scheduler
- Practice Partner® Patient Records

Critical Issues

- Inaccurate medical records
- Caregivers unable to access patients' complete medical records
- Ineffective prescription management

Results

- Improved clinician and staff productivity
- Better documentation at the point of care
- Anywhere, anytime access to patient charts
- Accurate medication lists

Wood River Family Practice, a medical group with two locations in rural Idaho, overcame a seemingly insurmountable obstacle to delivering quality patient care — paper-based medical records. While the flow of patients between the practice's two offices was seamless, the flow of patient information was not, due to the challenges of managing paper records. As a result, doctors at both locations were likely to see patients without their chart or with an incomplete chart. Frustrated, physicians often made decisions at the point of care with incomplete information.

The practice made a breakthrough by implementing an electronic health record (EHR) and automated scheduling system from McKesson. Now patient information is available securely from any location, even from physicians' homes. The office runs more efficiently as a result of easy, instant access to patient records. The system proved so effective that Dr. Richard Paris, a senior partner at Wood River who "moonlights" as the sole practitioner for a remote, county-owned clinic, linked that clinic to the system, too.

Challenges

The Wood River physicians care for 18,000 Blaine County residents at two offices, 10 miles apart.

The most significant challenge the group faced was access to complete, up-to-date patient records.

Serving a diverse and geographically dispersed population, the practice has allowed its patients to visit the office they are closest to at the time of their appointment. This policy, though convenient for patients, created the daunting task of tracking appointments and transporting the necessary charts between offices. "About one-third of the time," explains Dr. Paris, "we were seeing the patient without his record."

Maintaining accurate medication lists for each patient had become a major issue in the practice, in part due to inaccessible charts. Often, a prescription was written or refilled by phone, but the patient chart was unavailable to record the order. "We couldn't look at a record and believe the list of medications in the paper chart was accurate because things like telephone refills occasionally were missed," notes Dr. Paris.

Dr. Paris is also the sole physician providing care to the 3,000 residents of Custer County — a geographic area approximately the size of Rhode Island. The clinic is located in Challis, a town so remote that Dr. Paris flies a private plane there every other week. At other times, he supports the clinic's full-time physician assistant via e-mail and phone.

Case Study

“Having access to a patient’s record on every visit – and at any other place or time – is key, as is the ability for multiple people to do multiple things in the record simultaneously.”

Dr. Richard Paris

Senior Partner

Wood River Family Practice

Answers

In January 2002, Wood River implemented Practice Partner® Patient Records and Practice Partner® Appointment Scheduler, an EHR and automated scheduling system. From day one, all six physicians were using the system for every patient interaction.

The system allows physicians to access and update their patient record database from any office, clinic, hospital, and their home. “Having the chart in front of you is very basic but very important,” explains Dr. Paris. “With the EHR, the problem of inaccessible patient charts goes completely away.”

One of the most beneficial features has been the system’s prescription-writing function. “When we went live with the Practice Partner system,” adds Dr. Paris, “one rule was that every single prescription must be done through the EHR so it is part of the permanent record. Knowing that everything is current and accurately recorded has been huge for us.”

Dr. Paris also customized the system’s progress note templates to reflect the practice’s documentation patterns. As a result, the providers are able to quickly and easily record all the required information.

Additionally, Dr. Paris incorporated preventive care reminders into the templates, prompting physicians to recommend tests or procedures during the patient visit.

Results

Particularly for rural practices, the EHR is a powerful tool for accessing patient information. Utilizing the Practice Partner EHR, Dr. Paris and Wood River Family Medicine have significantly improved their ability to serve geographically dispersed and diverse populations efficiently and effectively. “Having access to a patient’s record on every visit – and at any other place and time – is key, as is the ability for multiple people to do multiple things in the record simultaneously,” says Dr. Paris.

With Practice Partner Patient Records, Dr. Paris accesses and updates records from even his most remote clinics without having to keep track of or transport charts between practices. The system simplifies charting and improves the accuracy of patient records, enhancing the quality of care and streamlining workflow.

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