

Case Study Improved Efficiency

Dr. Michael Pattillo of Three Rivers Family Medicine in Richland, Wash., compares the adoption of electronic health records (EHR) to getting into a swimming pool. “Some people just dive in while others slowly dip, starting with their big toe,” he says.

According to Pattillo, who specializes in internal medicine and pediatrics, adopting an EHR system depends on a physician’s comfort level with technology as well as a practice’s financial situation. For this reason, he and his partners decided that a two-phase implementation would be an effective way to move the practice away from paper and slowly introduce the EHR.

The practice started by using **NetPracticeRESULTS™**, a result-management tool enabling direct interfaces with labs, radiology and hospital partners that allow physicians and staff to electronically view and sign-off on results and reports. For 18 months the practice used NetPracticeRESULTS which, according to Pattillo, **helped them manage patient information and eliminate paperwork.** Then Pattillo convinced his colleagues to upgrade to Noteworthy’s web-based EHR, **NetPracticeEHRweb™.**

After using NetPracticeEHRweb for barely eight months at Three Rivers Family Medicine, Dr. Pattillo saw **a major impact on their ability to streamline office workflow, improve communication with the practice’s healthcare partners and more efficiently support patients.** Of the 40-member staff, about 30 people—including the front desk, switchboard, billing, nurses, medical assistants and most of the doctors—are using different features and adopting them at different paces.

“For me, with new patients, paper charts are now almost obsolete because information is input from the first visit,” he says. “Before NetPracticeEHRweb, my desk always had a huge stack of charts. Now, there’s maybe one chart.”

For Pattillo, flexibility is a major benefit. With NetPracticeEHRweb, physicians can input information into charts the quickest and easiest way—by using macros, templates or dictation. NetPracticeEHRweb also allows several people to simultaneously view a patient’s chart, which not only **reduces what he calls “the paper chase” but also saves time for the office staff and patients.** Pattillo gives the example of a well child whose chart is being reviewed for a shot while someone else on the staff is setting up an auditory evaluation.

From Pattillo’s perspective, NetPracticeEHRweb’s three key benefits include ePrescribing, the ability to send records, and connectivity. Pattillo says Noteworthy’s ePrescribing component—**NetPracticeERX™**—lets him instantly manage medication refills and new prescriptions. Pattillo fills 15-20 medication refills a day, but rarely pulls a chart now since he can communicate electronically with pharmacies. This not only **makes managing refill requests simple but also keeps patients’ medication lists and drug histories up to date and in one place.**

Pattillo is also impressed with NetPracticeEHRweb’s “Send Records” function, which allows him to connect to labs, hospitals, pharmacies and other doctors in his community. He can **instantly review all the records and then—with one click—send the patient’s history and information.** “If you use it correctly, it will eliminate faxes, copies and mailing,” he says. Using NetPracticeEHRweb, he and a specialist once ended up working in “real time,” solving a patient’s problem immediately instead of what might have taken two weeks.

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Three Rivers Family Medicine



NetPracticeEHRweb's connectivity is also invaluable to Pattillo, giving him secure access to a complete spectrum of patient data. "I can get information wherever and whenever, as long as I have internet access. Plus, I know it's HIPAA compliant," he explains. Using NetPracticeEHRweb has dramatically changed how Pattillo manages middle-of-the-night phone calls, especially when he's on call. Whether it's a patient calling with a problem or an emergency room crisis, Pattillo has **instant access to medical records**.

"Instead of going back to my office, I can quickly and easily pull up notes to see what a patient means by saying he's taking a 'little red pill,'" he explains. And if Pattillo speaks with a patient after hours and determines a follow-up appointment is necessary, he sends a message to his nurse asking her to call the patient the next day.

In addition to reducing paper and increasing his efficiency, Pattillo says NetPracticeEHRweb has **significantly reduced transcriptions costs**. Although Pattillo tends to input directly into his laptop, he still likes to use a blend of options because he doesn't want to make what he calls "cookie cutter notes." He uses templates when appropriate but usually adds a personal comment about each patient. Before using NetPracticeEHRweb, Pattillo averaged \$60-\$70 a day in transcription costs. In less

that a year this cost was cut by one-half to one-third; with NetPracticeEHRweb there is no longer a need to dictate patient history and mediations.

Patients also reap the benefits when their doctors use EHRs. Pattillo estimates that 95 percent of the time he can pull up information and show it to his patients on the laptop or print out information. "I don't need to ask someone to find me a chart or call the lab or hospital to get information, because it's always available," he says.

Pattillo notes that Noteworthy is very responsive to requests for new features, such as a pediatric growth chart. He sees NetPracticeEHRweb as especially good for family practice physicians who end up as the keeper of so much patient information. Although Pattillo acknowledges that the initial setup for EHR takes time and requires physicians to change how they work, overall he says, "It's definitely worth it." ■