

MEDICAL ASSOCIATES CLINIC IMPROVES COMMUNICATION WITH MCKESSON'S AMBULATORY EHR SOLUTION

Profile

Founded in 1924, Medical Associates Clinic is Iowa's oldest multi-specialty group. Today it is a complex and busy practice, with 141 providers in more than 28 specialties practicing from 16 locations and serving patients in Dubuque and neighboring towns in Wisconsin and Illinois. The clinic also owns a 40,000-member health plan and operates three joint ventures with a local hospital. Practitioners log 540,000 patient visits and write 350,000 prescriptions a year.

Medical Associates made a strategic decision to deploy an ambulatory electronic health record (EHR) solution in order to maintain its leadership position, according to clinic president Mark Runde, M.D. "We are the leader in healthcare in our region," he says. "McKesson's EHR solution gives us real-time clinical information, which makes us more efficient and improves patient care and satisfaction."

Challenges

Medical Associates needed a flexible but strong clinical solution to quell the overflow of paper. "We stored, photocopied, filed and moved about 250,000 patient charts annually, at a cost of \$2 million a year," says Brian Schatz, the organization's chief operating officer.

It took days for updated information to be filed in the patient chart. A single chart had to be circulated to multiple caregivers. And clinicians had to make decisions with incomplete or delayed information. "While gaining a financial return on our investment was important, our primary motivation was to document clinical data electronically to improve communication throughout the organization," Schatz says.

Answers

Medical Associates turned to the Horizon Ambulatory Care™ ambulatory EHR solution from McKesson. Horizon Ambulatory Care combines prescription management, clinical order entry and encounter documentation capabilities to help physician practices eliminate mountains of paperwork and operate more efficiently. Medical Associates already uses the Horizon Practice Plus™ practice management system from McKesson for scheduling, registration and billing. Therefore, adding Horizon Ambulatory Care was a logical fit, enabling the clinic to integrate clinical and financial data without making new investments in administrative processes.

"Horizon Ambulatory Care fits our physician workflow," Schatz says. "The modules can be deployed separately or together, which is critical to our plan to introduce the new system gradually."

Results

To date, with the complete rollout still in process, Horizon Ambulatory Care allows 103 providers in 25 specialties to write more than 26,000 e-prescriptions per month. More than 50 providers in 12 specialties use the Orders and Results module, and 23 clinicians in four specialties are deploying the entire system to document and chart all patient care electronically.

"Within the first two weeks of switching a couple dozen physicians to the electronic charting system, we saw a 40 to 80 percent reduction in dictation," says Schatz.

The clinic spends \$1.5 million annually on transcription services to transcribe dictated reports. That number will be cut by 75 percent once the EHR is fully

AT A GLANCE

■ ORGANIZATION

*Medical Associates Clinic
Dubuque, Iowa*

- Practice locations: 16
- Physicians: 100
- Mid-level providers: 41
- Specialties: 28
- Office visits per year: 540,000

■ SOLUTION SPOTLIGHT

- Horizon Ambulatory Care
- Horizon Practice Plus

■ CRITICAL ISSUES

- Inefficient communications and workflow
- Escalating costs due to inefficient paper-based processes
- Increasing volume of paper

■ RESULTS

- Projected net gain of \$1.7 million annually from reducing paper, transcription services and chart handling, and improving the accuracy of coding
- \$145,000 saved on medical records staffing within six months of deployment; anticipated annual savings of \$580,000
- Projected 75 percent reduction in annual transcription costs
- More than 26,000 prescriptions per month delivered electronically to pharmacies, reducing phone calls and providing better patient interaction

CASE STUDY

MEDICAL ASSOCIATES CLINIC • AMBULATORY SOLUTIONS

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Mark Runde, M.D.
Clinic President

integrated into clinical practice. Horizon Ambulatory Care allows physicians to quickly document patient visits by using pre-defined templates designed specifically for their specialty and their individual practice, significantly reducing the need for transcription.

In addition, because the software automatically documents exactly what care was delivered, coding is simpler and more accurate. “We expect to gain at least \$500,000 in annual revenue as a result of more thorough data capture and accurate coding,” Schatz says.

From a medical records staffing perspective, the clinic already has reaped a 10 percent savings. When fully deployed to the entire staff, the system will further reduce temporary medical records staffing hours, leading to a 43 percent labor cost reduction and saving \$580,000 annually, Schatz estimates.

Ultimately, the clinic expects to see a net gain of \$1.7 million per year, thanks to decreased costs associated with staffing, transcription services and chart maintenance, as well as increased revenue from better coding.

The staff’s reaction to Horizon Ambulatory Care has been overwhelmingly positive. “The greatest gain for me is having instant access to information that I can act on quickly,” says pediatrics chief, Douglas Olk, M.D. “If the mom of a child I saw two days ago calls to say that he’s throwing up his medicine, I can call up the encounter instantly, change the medication and send the prescription to her pharmacy to be ready when she arrives.”

Horizon Ambulatory Care has also helped Dr. Olk streamline his office routine. “While I’m in the room with the patient, I can order tests, submit the order, and I’m done, Olk says. “I don’t have to come out, interrupt the nurse who’s busy or on the

phone, and I don’t have to get a piece of paper to write it all down. There are fewer steps and fewer chances for mistakes.”

For Mark Niemer, M.D., the first Medical Associates physician to use all three modules (Prescription Writer, Orders and Results, and Chart), Horizon Ambulatory Care’s charting flexibility is important. In addition to typing, he can dictate into the recording device and save the file for playback, handwrite notes or drawings, scan in documents or import digital images. Dr. Niemer points out that Horizon Ambulatory Care enables every physician to use the chart differently. “Ophthalmologists may like to draw pictures of the retina. For a surgeon describing the location of lesions, a picture is worth a thousand words,” he says.

Nurses are enjoying benefits of the EHR system as well. Medical Associates has measured a 26 percent indirect productivity gain for nurses because they are logging fewer hours chasing down records, recording information and calling pharmacies. Because they are more productive, nurses are able to spend more time interacting with patients and their families.

With Horizon Ambulatory Care, Medical Associates will be able to use clinical information to drive an evidence-based practice model. “We can build in health maintenance alerts and perform population-based analyses to determine how well we care for our most common diagnoses,” Schatz says. “That’s going to give us more quality management tools, which is exciting. In a paper world, you just couldn’t get there from here.” ■

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