

Authier Miller Pape Eyecare Consultants An EHR & Practice Management Success Story

The Problem: Going to EHR without Slowing Doctors Down

Authier Miller Pape Eyecare Consultants provides primary eye care to a large swath of rural northeastern Nebraska from its main office in Norfolk and 2 outreach clinics. Since the 1980s, the busy practice has depended on technology to help manage its far-flung operations. By 1999 it had consolidated all its practice management functions with one vendor, Compulink, and was poised for the next big step: Electronic health records (EHR). "It became apparent that searching for charts was consuming a disproportionate share of staff and doctor time," says managing partner Steve Miller, OD. "I knew EHR would give us better access to records, but I wanted something that could adapt to the way we practice, rather than require us to change the way we practice to suit the system."

The Solution: A Fully Customizable, Certified EHR Solution

Fortunately, the practice didn't need to look far. Compulink's Eyecare Advantage™, the industry's only fully customizable Certified EHR and Practice Management system, tightly integrates with the practice management modules the practice was already using. Between 2003 and 2008, Dr. Miller and his colleagues gradually transitioned to a completely paperless optical shop and computerized exam records.

They customized tabs and screens extensively, restructuring the patient history, color-coding refractions in the system (red for right eye, green for left), and adding fields to help doctors remember their patients' hobbies and nicknames. Using Compulink's Smart Functions provided additional efficiencies. For example, entering a diagnosis that requires a PQRI code automatically generates a pop-up box asking for the code. "That feature alone made implementing PQRI much less frustrating for us and allowed us to collect incentive payments much sooner than other practices," says Dr. Miller. "Customization is absolutely the key to making your life easier. Without the ability to make the screens your own, EHR can really slow you down," he says.

The Results: A Streamlined Staff; Enhanced Patient Care

The efficiencies of EHR allowed the practice to merge its clinical and front office staff into a single job description. "We didn't eliminate positions, but we cross-trained everyone," he explains. With the exception of a billing specialist, the practice no longer needed front office-only administrative staff. "We find that our patients are much better served by having their calls answered by technically knowledgeable staff who can respond to questions right away," says Dr. Miller.

EHR has also enhanced patient care by making it easier for the doctors to recognize change over time and evaluate disease progression. "At a glance, I can see the patient's complete medication and refractive history, as well as test results from the previous visit. It makes it much easier to quickly judge, for example, whether a cataract is progressing."

Pearls for Success

The transition to EHR can be challenging for an established practice, but Dr. Miller says he overcame those challenges by presenting a positive attitude and empowering staff to use Advantage could make their jobs easier. "We set clear timelines and stuck to them, and we made a concerted effort to eliminate paper as a crutch," he says. One trick he used was requiring staff to complete a form if they wanted access to a paper chart. "Usually, I could demonstrate that the information they requested on the form was already available in the electronic record."

Dr. Miller views EHR as an absolutely necessary long-term investment in the practice. "It takes time to realize the efficiencies and cost savings, but they will come," he says.

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