

Rx for success

Cardiology Group Puts EMR at the Heart of Practice

It's been a busy few years for Heart South Cardiovascular Group, a thriving cardiology practice in Alabaster, Alabama. The group has grown considerably since its inception in 2003, and in the last two years added both Centricity PM and EMR. The EMR implementation, completed last winter, was spearheaded by the group's two newest physicians, Dr. Cliff Vance and Dr. Munish Goyal.

"We have a significant Medicare population, and we knew we would add EMR eventually," said Heart South Administrator Rita Johnson. "But the real impetus came when Drs. Vance and Goyal, who had used EMR in their fellowships, pushed us to start the process and agreed to be our project leaders. It was their vision."

And a big vision it was. The practice has multiple locations and is technology intense. The doctors wanted to integrate the EMR with as much technology as they could. "Our project committee felt it was important to make the most of the system," said Johnson. "We wanted to be able to improve our workflow to the greatest extent possible."

What a Difference

The EMR implementation began in December 2008. To allow time to get used to the new system, the group depressed its schedule by 50% the first week, 25% the second week, and went back to a normal schedule by the third week. By March 31, 2009, everyone in the practice was using the EMR. "We knew we had to make the switch fast," Johnson said. "Working out of two systems just was not going to work."

The group's trainer, HealthSystems' Randy Cook, worked closely with the staff to bring them up to speed. In addition to all the standard EMR functions, the group is using ePrescribing, and has integrated EKG, vital signs, nuclear

medicine, echo cardiogram and CTA reports and images, and lab and hospital reports. They also added Dragon NaturallySpeaking voice recognition software so that they could avoid transcription time and costs.

In the past, the staff dragged suitcases of paper files with them from location to location. Once the EMR was up, they embarked on a very aggressive document scanning "pre-load" so that all of the current patients' charts were in the EMR in time for their next appointments. "It's especially nice for our clinicians to be able to show patients their own images," said Johnson. "I think the patients are impressed that their doctors are so progressive."

Words to the Wise

Johnson suggests that practices considering EMR do some homework before starting the process. "We visited a similar, very busy practice in Tampa that was using Centricity EMR just to see how it worked in the office setting," she said. "We also talked with them, and with HealthSystems, about what we could expect in terms of process, training and going live with the system."

Now that the EMR has been up and running for a while, Johnson can't imagine what they did without it. "The efficiencies are amazing," she said. "No more paper charts. ePrescribing is great. Lab and test results feed directly into the system. Nothing gets lost or misplaced. Our doctors love it and our patients love it."



Heart South
Cardiovascular Group

At A Glance

Heart South Cardiovascular Group

Physicians	6
Nurse Practitioners	5
Support Staff	44
2 offices, 4 outreach locations,	
2 nuclear medicine cameras,	
3 echo cardiogram units,	
1 multislice CT scanner	

“Plus, we've shrunk our medical records department and saved \$80,000 a year on transcription alone. I can't say enough about the system — and HealthSystems,” she concluded. “We definitely made the right decision.”