

# Rx for success

## Patient Portal Improves Practice Workflow — and Saves Money

The clinicians and administrators at Athens Associates in Family Practice put a high value on time — not only their own time, but their patients' time, too. Implementing a patient portal has saved both the practice and its patients countless hours on the phone. And since time is money, the patient portal has had a significant positive financial impact on the practice as well.

Athens Associates began using what is now Centricity EMR in 1999, and added Centricity PM in 2004. The practice has been using the ezAccess Patient Portal for over a year.

HIPAA secure and CCHIT certified, ezAccess was built specifically for Centricity, so full integration is seamless. The portal allows the practice — and patients — to handle scheduling, reminder calls and prescription refills online. Patients can also see their lab results and pay their bills online. A secure messaging feature, clinical questionnaires, consent and policy document review and signature are also available.

### Why a Patient Portal?

For years, consumers have interacted with the companies they do business with via a website. Interacting with their physicians' offices in the same way is a huge convenience — and now almost expected.

For Athens Associates, moving administrative interaction online was a natural step. “So much of our administrative time was spent handling non-medical calls,” said Practice Manager Krystin Keller. “We loved the idea of a patient portal to reduce our non-medical time on the phone.”

Keller says the practice was initially hoping to replace one full-time staff member. “But in fact, we have been able to replace two full-time staff members who were handling the load of scheduling, reminder calls, bill payments and prescription refills,” Keller explained.

The practice also has two check-in kiosks in

the office. If patients aren't accustomed to electronic check-in, office staffers will help them figure it out. After the first time, even the practices' few reluctant patients seem to have no problem with the kiosk check-in.

### Easy to Control & Customize

Keller credits ezAccess with making it all easy. “We have full and total control of every aspect of the portal,” she said. “We can turn on only the functions we want to use. It's very easy to customize, to help patients log in, change a password, add or delete something. Plus it's built to work with Centricity, so everything is right there. It's just very simple and straightforward.”

According to Keller, the key to integration is using the portal fully and immediately. “I recommend making it a mandatory part of the workflow right away, both for the staff and patients,” she said. “You just need to explain what will be required and how easy it is to use. Set it up as part of the workflow, and use it with every patient without fail. Adoption will be quick. Once everyone is accustomed to using it, you'll see a significant drop in phone calls.”

Of course, HealthSystems support is just a call away if Keller and her team have any questions. “HealthSystems is always — instantaneously — available to help if we have any issues,” Keller said. “Their support is phenomenal. It makes a huge difference.”

Keller says the portal has paid for itself several times over. “It's a no-brainer,” she said. “Even the patients who were hesitant to use it at first are now fully onboard. The reaction has been extremely positive. It's just a more efficient way to interact.”



### At A Glance

#### Athens Associates in Family Practice

- 1 physician
- 1 physician assistant
- 4 medical assistants
- 8 support/administrators
- 4 locations

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