



The Westchester Medical Group

Advancing quality and managing costs
with Centricity[®] Practice Management
and Electronic Medical Record



Solution overview

Company profile

- Providers: 110 physicians
- Practice Type: multi-specialty
- Physician-owned and managed
- Based in White Plains, New York
- 7 locations

Situation

As the Westchester Medical Group observed its tenth anniversary in 2006, growth was the watchword. The expanding team of physicians offers a full range of medical specialties and ancillary services at seven locations, including a newly-constructed 65,000-square-foot space opened in December 2006. The Group relies on a team approach to healthcare because of the benefits that this method offers to patients, including easy access to specialists and coordination of essential patient information.

Business challenge

One of the most automated and efficient practices in the nation, the Westchester Medical Group has a history of success at implementing technology to improve operational efficiency. In 2001, Westchester Medical Group outlined requirements for a significant transformation. "It became clear that for us to be truly special as a practice, we needed to facilitate communication among our physicians. Especially with physicians in different offices, we needed to ensure that patients had the sense that their care was completely coordinated," said Simeon Schwartz, MD, CEO, Westchester Medical Group. "We saw that documenting our quality was important for our organizational vision as well as for our relationships with patients and payers. And we were seeking opportunities to improve the financial status of our physicians."

Business solution

In 2002, after a period of detailed comparison with practice management and electronic records systems available at the time, a cross-functional team at Westchester identified Centricity Practice Management and EMR as the best fit for the practice's requirements. Centricity offers excellent, integrated document management, and this was a very important capability because much of the planned efficiency centered on improving that process. The template approach appealed to Westchester Medical because it streamlines the collection of meaningful data for quality reporting, according to Dr. Schwartz, and Centricity's connectivity is outstanding. "Connectivity is the hallmark of what makes an EMR valuable, and while others claimed to have it, Centricity had a powerful interface engine that we still use today," he noted.

The plan was presented to the Westchester Medical Group partners, shareholders, and board, and approval was given to purchase in July. Centricity was live at Westchester Medical Group in September 2002, six weeks after the start of the implementation.

Benefits of the solution

Rapid ROI

Due diligence was a hallmark of Westchester Medical Group's choice of GE Healthcare's Centricity® Practice Management (PM) and Electronic Medical Record (EMR) solutions, giving the group confidence they would see a positive return on their investment.

"As a mature practice, our ROI on the Centricity system was rapid. We more than paid for the system in the first year just by the reduction in the number of people who handled paper," said Schwartz.

"On the first day of go-live, we were hand-writing some notes and charts, but practice-wide all documents coming in externally such as lab tests, x-ray reports, and all of our dictation was stored in the EMR. The effect was that we could reduce the number of FTEs handling medical records from 23 to 6, and today we still have 6, even though our physician numbers have doubled to 110," he explained.

Significant savings and efficiencies

Within a year of going live, Westchester Medical had dramatically reduced personnel in the medical records department, virtually eliminated transcription, and had re-deployed staff previously involved in order entry and chart entry.

"After five years, the Group has gone from five FTE's per physician to 3.2. At our current size, that means we are saving the equivalent of approximately 180 FTEs. And since our average FTE salary cost is \$40,000, that represents over \$6 million dollars in savings each year," noted Dr. Schwartz. "Our transcription costs are now less than \$20,000 a year, and before, at half our current size, they were over \$300,000. In current dollars, we are saving more than \$500,000 per year in transcription costs alone," noted Dr. Schwartz.

While the savings in terms of staff reductions for dictation, charge, and order entry were significant, Dr. Schwartz emphasized that gaining added revenue-generating space is also a vital benefit on an ongoing basis.

"The former medical records department in our main facility – 3,000 square feet – is the new GI department including endoscopy labs. So that was turned into a profit center, and at our new location, we're achieving the equivalent of 30 percent more space because of our operational efficiencies with EMR," explained Dr. Schwartz.

Physician autonomy maintained

In implementing technology to achieve efficiency, Dr. Schwartz emphasized the importance of preserving physician autonomy as they are relieved of some decisions.

“As a physician leader, you have a social contract with your physicians that says, ‘I’m only going to take away autonomy from you with your consent, and only on issues that are critical to the success of the organization.’ The GE system helped us do exactly that, because we were able to gain credibility with our physicians by offering a comprehensive solution,” said Dr. Schwartz.

“Our biggest savings of all was the elimination of staff doing order entry and charge entry, but that did not increase the physician’s workload by one minute,” Dr. Schwartz noted. The physicians had always checked boxes off on forms, but now it was done on a computer.

The average training time at Westchester Medical for complete CPOE (computerized physician order entry) was less than 30 minutes. “The logic of the orders module within the EMR was clear to the physicians right away, so we gained value almost immediately,” Dr. Schwartz stated.

Achieving recognition for quality

In addition to cost savings and process efficiencies, quality enhancements were a high priority when the Centricity solution was first implemented at Westchester Medical Group. In 2004, the practice was awarded the prestigious Certificate of Recognition from the American Diabetes Association (ADA) and the National Committee for Quality Assurance (NCQA) Diabetes Physician Recognition Program. Dr. Schwartz notes that Centricity EMR’s structured data entry approach is a crucial enabler of the ability to participate in these quality outcomes initiatives.

“Quality is an overall goal here, and was an up-front priority when we implemented this solution. We have since achieved NCQA heart-stroke, and are in the final stages of becoming the first large practice in New York State to achieve Bridges to Excellence,” said Dr. Schwartz. “This would not have been possible before we had the Centricity system in place.”

Quality recognition has also come from the patient community. “I sit in an exam room with my computer, do a consultation, and my whole practice has changed. Our patients love it. We even use the DINAMAP vital signs monitor from GE, and the information goes right into the notes electronically,” Dr. Schwartz explained.

Ongoing GE relationship integral to the vision

Looking ahead, Dr. Schwartz noted that Westchester Medical Group will continue to work with GE, participating in an active group of Centricity users who provide input that allows the company to enhance and improve Centricity and other GE Healthcare solutions in place at the practice.

“Being a successful practice, we feel that we have good insights about where this system should go and what needs to happen. Our relationship with GE is integral to our vision for the continued transformation of our medical practice and our future financial success,” said Dr. Schwartz.

“ We’ve achieved hundreds of workflow and process improvements since we implemented Centricity, to the benefit of patients and physicians alike. On a national basis, according to MGMA standards, we have above-average customer satisfaction, and in a recent AMGA survey of our group, we finished in the 98th percentile for physician satisfaction. On FTE’s per physician alone, we’re saving over \$6 million each year. Centricity has made an enormous difference here on many levels, and it continues to provide new efficiencies years after the initial deployment.”

Simeon Schwartz, M.D.,
CEO, Westchester Medical Group

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