

The Dermatology Group



Solution overview

Company profile

Dr. Danny Groisser founded The Dermatology Group 12 years ago in Verona, New Jersey. Since then, the practice has grown to five physicians who see about 800 patients each week. These doctors are young and dynamic, using the latest technology to improve both patient care and office efficiency. Extended office hours allow busy professionals to come in before or after work. The Dermatology Group provides mostly medical and surgical dermatologic care, treating skin cancer, dermatitis, psoriasis, eczema and similar problems. The practice also participates in numerous clinical trials.

Situation

In 2000, Dr. Groisser purchased separate Electronic Medical Records (EMR) and practice management systems, hoping to create an integrated system. Unfortunately, the EMR in particular fell far short of his expectations, and he quickly saw that he would have to invest in something better. Looking for a site with an EMR that worked well, Dr. Groisser met Aaron Shechter at The Thomas Jefferson University Headache Center, where Shechter had implemented a system based on Centricity® Electronic Medical Record (EMR).

Business solution

The Dermatology Group selected Centricity EMR and Centricity® Practice Management (PM). Shechter and Groisser then spent nine months customizing both programs and building interfaces. Now the practice has a completely paperless system, including interfaces from Centricity Practice Management to Centricity EMR, from Centricity EMR to four different laboratories, between the Document Scanning system and both Centricity PM and Centricity EMR, and from Centricity PM to TeleVox®, an automated appointment reminder system.

It's one thing to decide your practice is ready to go paperless, but quite another to implement a system that works. One false start demonstrated to The Dermatology Group in Verona, New Jersey the importance of selecting the right software and setting it up properly. Now Centricity Practice Management and Centricity EMR work together to showcase just how much the right computer system can do for a practice.

Aaron Shechter, an epidemiologist and researcher, has spent the last five years setting up and maintaining computer systems built around Centricity EMR. In 2001, he joined The Dermatology Group to create a computer system that would match the practice's technologically advanced medical care. This new system is built around the Centricity EMR and Centricity Practice Management, which work together to reduce costs, increase efficiency and improve patient care.

Finding the right pieces

The first time The Dermatology Group tried to integrate an EMR and practice management system, the medical records component turned out to be completely unworkable. They decided to scrap that attempt and start over.

To keep from making the same mistake again, founder and managing partner, Dr. Danny Groisser, asked to see Centricity EMR installed and in action before making a commitment. Centricity EMR's sales staff directed him to Aaron Shechter and the Headache Center at Thomas Jefferson University Hospital.

"I offered him a 30-minute tour," Shechter remembers, "and Dr. Groisser's jaw dropped when he saw everything our information system could do. He said, 'This is exactly what I want.' I told him he could have it, if he was willing to make the investment and put in some work up front."

So Dr. Groisser asked Shechter to help his practice as a consultant; three months later, in October 2001, Shechter joined the practice full time. His goal was to create a comprehensive medical information system, including patient charts, laboratory information, scheduling, billing, collections and document imaging. All of these pieces had to work together to support a successful, efficient practice.

The doctors knew they wanted to use the Centricity EMR. But should they try to save The Dermatology Group's year-old practice management system or install a new one to work with Centricity EMR?

After analyzing the interface capabilities of several different practice management systems, the doctors selected Centricity Practice Management. "Centricity was the best choice for the interface," Shechter explains. "It's a good system with a good reputation. And, it was critical for us to get a workable interface between the practice management side and the EMR."

Centricity Practice Management was installed first, and Centricity EMR was added about ten weeks later. A program called Rosetta Stone facilitates data transfer between the two. In addition, Shechter created interfaces with four separate laboratories who do blood and pathology testing. Document Scanning stores scanned documents and links them to patient charts and demographic records. A mole-mapping system called Dermagraphix also interfaces with Centricity EMR, and the TeleVox automated appointment reminder system works from the Centricity database.

The Dermatology Group is now fully electronic. Every referral, insurance card, consent form and other document is scanned and linked to the patient file. Keeping these large documents in a separate Document Scanning database keeps Centricity EMR and Centricity Practice Management, the workhorse programs, from getting too bulky and slow.

The practice's two offices are connected by a T1 line. In addition, doctors can access the system remotely over a secure VPN connection through the practice's firewall.

Shechter found that training administrative and medical staff to use Centricity Practice Management and Centricity EMR was easy. The programs' Windows-based design and intuitive workflows allowed everyone to be productive quickly.

Working together

When patients call The Dermatology Group for an appointment, the scheduler enters all their demographic and insurance information into Centricity Practice Management. Centricity makes it easy to access information from anywhere in the system, so both the patient record and the schedule can be completed without opening and closing a lot of screens. Once the patient record has been created in Centricity Practice Management, the data goes automatically into Centricity EMR, where the patient chart is created.

Each exam room at The Dermatology Group has a small-profile Dell SX-260 desktop computer with a 17" flat screen, which can either be mounted on the wall or on a computer cart. Physicians do 90% of their charting with point-and-click templates. They don't need to give dictation or hire transcriptionists, and all their data entry is completed in the exam room or at the nurses' stations.

Messaging fields in Centricity EMR help communication and recordkeeping. Doctors can send notes to each other or to a nurse right from the chart. In addition, when a patient calls to ask a question or request a prescription refill, the nurse or physician can quickly look up the date of the last visit before approving the refill.

Better billing, better patient care

Over the last two years, this practice has doubled in size. Yet, because of Centricity Practice Management's and Centricity EMR's efficiency, they've had only minimal increases in staff, especially in the billing department.

Just three months after the system was fully implemented, this practice was able to eliminate three dictation and file clerks. One person now spends about half her time scanning documents, but she's able to complete other tasks, too.

"Since we built our new computer system around Centricity EMR and Centricity Practice Management, this practice has almost doubled in size without adding administrative or clerical staff. I estimate that this system saves us more than \$60,000/year in staffing costs alone, plus another \$10,000/year in paper and chart costs."

Aaron Shechter
Director of Research and Practice Operations,
The Dermatology Group, PC

Shechter says, "Our billers love this system because it's so much easier to work accounts receivable. Everything's right there; they don't have to write down a list of charts, pull them, find the data, photocopy it and then refile them. They can pull up everything instantly."

Since installing Centricity, The Dermatology Group has been able to send many more of its claims electronically. The only claims that are sent on paper, less than 10%, are those that require physician notes as documentation.

Claims are getting paid faster, too, partly due to electronic filing, but also because Centricity Practice Management's error checking and Centricity EMR's clinical documentation ensure that the claims are accurate when they go out. Average time in A/R for this practice is now less than 30 days, compared to 60-90 days for an average practice, according to Shechter.

With all the information in one place, it's easier to track everything from patient follow-up to insurance denials. "There's no more 'I don't know what you're talking about,'" Dr. Groisser says. "The doctors love this system because it improves their communications with each other, with referring physicians, and with patients. That helps them provide a higher quality of care."

After The Dermatology Group's significant investment of both time and money in the Centricity system, Dr. Groisser is very pleased with the result. "It's worth the work we put into the planning, the interface design, the testing and all the rest," he says. "We have a showcase site, especially with the scanning system and the lab interfaces. When I show people everything our system can do, their jaws hit the ground."

Benefits

Within three months of implementing the combined Centricity system, the Dermatology Group was able to eliminate three full-time positions, saving more than \$60,000/year in personnel costs and another \$10,000/year in paper and chart expenses. But the benefits of this paperless system go far beyond its financial rewards; the doctors most appreciate how it improves physician-to-physician communications and patient care.

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