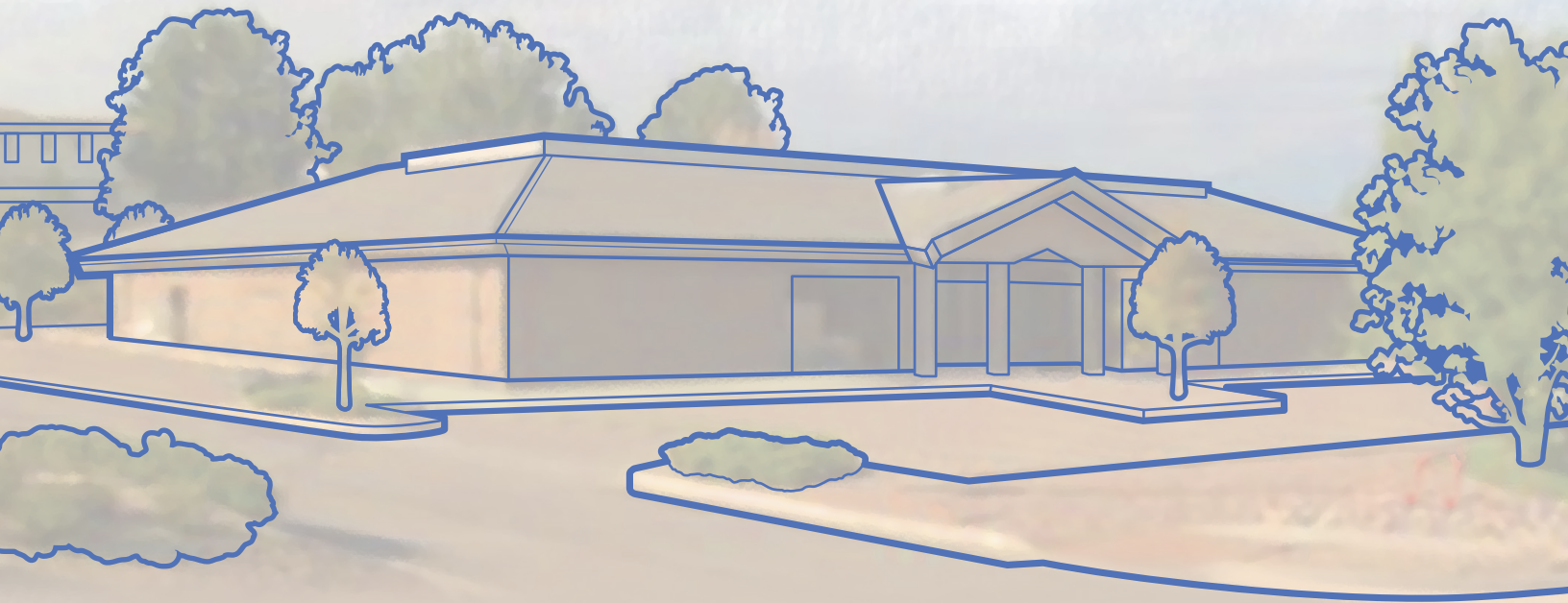


# Smooth transition, strong returns

A quick and cost-effective transition from paper to electronic medical records helped Dublin Primary Care streamline staffing, improve care processes, shorten the revenue cycle, and prepare for upcoming payment reform.



# Summary

Dublin Primary Care, based in Colorado Springs, CO, is a medical practice with nine physicians dedicated to helping patients achieve and maintain healthy, productive lifestyles. The practice is founded in the belief that high-quality healthcare requires personal and comprehensive services and the active involvement of every patient. Clinical services include pediatric, adolescent and adult primary care, sports medicine, gynecological care, and minor emergency care.

Centricity Practice Solution has helped the nine-physician Dublin Primary Care practice cut costs and increase operating efficiency. The implementation was fast and cost-effective because the practice took a positive attitude and chose overnight activation instead of a phased approach. In the future, leaders believe the software will continue to help the practice thrive through upcoming payment reform. Deborah Milburn, administrator for the practice, based in Colorado Springs, CO, notes, "What motivated us to move was that the world was changing, and we felt that we needed to change with it."

The transition from paper to electronic records has:

- Achieved one-year return on investment.
- Reduced FTEs by more than one per physician.
- Reduced days in accounts receivable from 60-90 days to 30-45 days.
- Provided analytics that improve understanding of finances and patient trends.
- Provided intuitive and practical tools that help enhance patient care.
- Helped demonstrate improved outcomes for reimbursement negotiations with payers.

## Going electronic was worth the investment

Physician-owned Dublin Primary Care was an early adopter of medical practice technology. Between July 2002 and February 2003, Dublin transitioned its practice management software to Centricity Practice Management and adopted an early, separate EMR application. By 2006, the practice upgraded to Centricity Practice Solution, a more advanced, integrated PM and EMR software.

Dublin Primary Care knew medical technology was an important part of its long-term strategy. By acting on its vision of the future, Dublin has seen numerous financial benefits. Milburn reflects that adoption of an EMR in 2002 “took away a number of headaches we faced with paper charting, like misfiled charts and illegible and incomplete notes. For example, in the paper world, a doctor might write out a prescription and then get distracted and fail to put it in the paper chart. Now doctors enter the prescription in the system – the next time they see the chart, it’s going to be in there. And we’re not having to call the pharmacy because once it’s in the system, the prescription is already sent.” The EMR reduced lost time that was costing the practice money.

The technology also allowed Dublin to streamline clerical functions, helping to create a return on the investment after about one year, according to Milburn. In the paper world, the practice had eight billers; in the electronic world it needs only four because billing data entry is eliminated. The medical records staff decreased from eight to two people, who today scan information into electronic charts.

“We looked at other EMRs and found that GE was the best solution for our needs. Centricity Practice Solution is very user-friendly.”

**Deborah Milburn**  
Administrator  
Dublin Primary Care

“With a single database, there are no issues with interfaces between different products. We work with one vendor, and if we need support, we get it from one source.”

**Deborah Milburn**  
Administrator  
Dublin Primary Care

## A single, integrated database enabled further streamlining

In 2006, the practice replaced its first-generation EMR with the more sophisticated EMR module of Centricity Practice Solution. Milburn notes that Dublin’s selection of the integrated EMR and PM system had a number of benefits. “We were already with GE on the practice management side.” says Milburn.

“The immediate advantage was that it put our EMR and PM solution on a single database. With a single database, there are no issues with interfaces between different products. We work with one vendor, and if we need support, we get it from one source.

“A single database also improves coordination. There is no double data entry. In our registration process, we verify that we have the correct patient information. Once we have that, it runs throughout the system, so that anybody who needs or wants it can find it, whether in the chart module, scheduling, registration or billing.”

The PM solution flags errors in insurance claims so that staff can correct them before submittal. In addition, electronic remittance now automatically assigns payments to the proper patient accounts, greatly reducing payment data entry.

Overall, going electronic and then transitioning to Centricity Practice Solution, allowed Dublin to reduce staff by more than one FTE per physician – ultimately streamlining its FTE count per provider to 3.67, well below the 4.87 median quoted by the Medical Group Management Association. In addition, days in accounts receivable dropped from 60 to 90 days in the paper-based world to 30 to 45 days at present.

# Implementation was fast and cost effective – with the right approach, attitude, partner, and product

While practices are often concerned that the disruption caused by going electronic may outweigh the eventual benefits, Dublin's experience shows that even small practices can make the transition successfully without breaking the bank or the practice.

## “Flipping the switch” overnight accelerated implementation

While implementing its first EMR in 2002, and when migrating to Centricity Practice Solution in 2006, Dublin chose a rapid changeover instead of a phased approach. The primary reason was the additional cost to run and maintain two separate systems during the transition.

When Dublin adopted its first EMR, “We were looking for zero cost impact to our practice,” Milburn says. “If you have an EMR, you no longer need to buy paper charts and dividers and shelves to house them. You no longer need staff to purge the records every year and put them in storage. You no longer have transcription costs. But for those costs to go away, you have to fully implement the new system. We truly used a ‘big bang’ approach. The doctors were willing. We just decided to get everyone trained and just go live one morning.”

“Centricity Practice Solution makes life easier for our physicians because they have everything at their fingertips.”

**Deborah Milburn**  
Administrator  
Dublin Primary Care

## Benefits experienced by Dublin

- No issues with EMR-PM interfaces
- Single-vendor support
- Improved coordination
- Reduced data-entry
- Faster claims processing

## A can-do attitude limited implementation obstructions

“You need to approach it with the attitude that failure is not an option,” says Milburn. “My favorite expression is, ‘Everybody is on the train, and nobody can get off.’ You can’t let anyone sabotage the implementation. If our doctors wanted to complain, that was fine, but they had to come into my office and shut the door. And when that door opened, they had to be supportive.”

Implementation success was also linked closely to the confidence of the personnel in the security of their jobs during such a drastic change. The practice reduced staff without layoffs. “Your team needs to implement the changes, so you can’t have a fearful staff,” says Milburn. “We let everyone know that no one would be getting a pink slip – that we needed everybody here to do this, we lost people through natural attrition and those positions were never replaced.”

## Partnering with the right vendor increased return on investment

Milburn reflected that partnering with an experienced and supportive vendor made the implementation easier and more affordable. A GE Healthcare team led preparatory training classes and stayed on site for three days after go-live to help users as they learned on the job. Initially, physicians stayed late to fully understand the process of completing notes and documentation. Physicians kept their usual patient loads and schedules so that revenue was not sacrificed during the short-term transition. They soon learned how to document as quickly as with paper charts.

Lacking the financial resources for an in-house IT staff, Dublin handled the IT side of the implementation with support from GE Healthcare and a local vendor partner that handles the practice's hardware issues. "The relationship with GE has been very important," Milburn says. "They support us on anything related to the software and on any problem we can't resolve. GE support people can access our system remotely, so they can see what I am seeing, and I can then see what the solutions are. That is very beneficial – it makes things happen quickly, and when you have an issue, that is what you want."

## Intuitive software made implementation easier and more cost effective

Milburn notes that "We looked at other EMRs and found that GE was the best solution for our needs. Centricity Practice Solution is very user-friendly." The intuitive nature of the system helped the practice prepare its team for the technology with minimal training and make the transition literally overnight. In addition, Dublin purchased the Centricity Clinical Content forms and used them "straight out of the box," without trying to edit them before go-live. "I think it's a waste of resources to try to edit a product you haven't used yet," says Milburn. "It's far better to use the product for a month or so, and then bring your doctors together and let them all agree on what they like and don't like. Then you can edit the templates, and you're all speaking the same language."

## 25% Fewer FTEs per Provider

MGMA Median

4.87

Dublin Primary Care

3.67

25%

## 50% Fewer Days in A/R

Before going electronic

60-90

After going electronic

30-45

50%



# A powerful platform helps Dublin build its best practice now and in the future

Dublin selected Centricity Practice Solution for more than just its near-term benefits. The aim was to find a powerful software platform that would help make the practice's decision-making smarter, so it could continue to enhance its performance both financially and clinically over time.

## Strong analytics and intuitive, practical tools help Dublin continue to improve finances and enhance patient outcomes

Analytics drawing on the data within the Centricity Practice Solution database help physicians and staff extract detailed, actionable information in many areas: financials, patient volumes and trends in diagnoses, among others. "We can ask the what-if questions," says Milburn. "It allows us to really get down into the detail of what's happening in our practice." For example, the staff can determine charges and payments for the practice by payer and thus monitor payer balance and keep tabs on collection percentages.

Centricity Practice Solution also offers a number of intuitive, practical tools that help Dublin enhance clinical outcomes. For example, patient alert notes help Dublin communicate any information that all staff members need to know about a particular patient – such as the fact a hearing impaired person will need an interpreter. Reports on open orders serve as a "tickler file," making it easy for staff to identify patients who need important preventive care, such as routine mammograms, and remind them to make appointments.

With a user interface designed with extensive input from clinicians, Centricity Practice Solution "makes life easier for our physicians because they have everything at their fingertips," says Milburn. "That improves communication between the physicians and helps them to provide good care." Milburn notes that the system presents information in organized and easily accessible formats, so that if patients want a medication list or an immunization form, it can be printed quickly, helping them take more ownership of their care.

## Centricity Practice Solution is helping Dublin prepare for payment reform

In addition to helping Dublin reach its full potential as a practice, Centricity Practice Solution is helping the practice prepare for and take advantage of upcoming changes in the healthcare industry, such as payment reform. One powerful feature of Centricity Practice Solution is the ability to report on clinical data. By documenting notes in reportable data fields, providers can later analyze care delivered and look for additional ways to improve outcomes.

Dublin is a member of GE Healthcare's Medical Quality Improvement Consortium (MQIC), which enables the practice to benchmark its quality metrics against a nationwide database of nearly 30 million de-identified patient records and against widely recognized quality standards. In conjunction with MQIC, Centricity Practice Solution facilitates the reporting of clinical data that payers increasingly demand.

"Today, when our payers report quality measures, they are using billing data, because that is all they have," says Milburn. "Going forward, they will want to know, for example, how many diabetic patients are within a certain level for A1C? How many have had a foot exam in the last year? You don't get that information from claims data. You do get it from the EMR. That is what we're working with them to provide, and MQIC is the tool we are using."

Centricity Practice Solution's use of structured, reportable data and standardized clinical terminology is helping Dublin not only prepare for the future, but also make the most of it. The practice hopes to convince payers to increase reimbursement by sharing reports that benchmark Dublin's quality of care information against similar practices, and also by demonstrating that Dublin's patient outcomes are improving.

## Parting Words

Milburn notes that it is feasible to choose the right EMR and implement it successfully. "Centricity Practice Solution makes life much easier. I can't imagine any of our physicians ever wanting to go back."

Her final advice to physician practices implementing EMR and practice management solutions: "Do it right the first time. Keep your operational policies working well. Put your providers in the rooms so they can see the patients. Then your system just enhances the quality of everything."

## About GE Healthcare

GE Healthcare provides transformational medical technologies and services that are shaping a new age of patient care. Our broad expertise in medical imaging and information technologies, medical diagnostics, patient monitoring systems, drug discovery, biopharmaceutical manufacturing technologies, performance improvement and performance solutions services help our customers to deliver better care to more people around the world at a lower cost. In addition, we partner with healthcare leaders, striving to leverage the global policy change necessary to implement a successful shift to sustainable healthcare systems.

Our “healthymagination” vision for the future invites the world to join us on our journey as we continuously develop innovations focused on reducing costs, increasing access and improving quality around the world. Headquartered in the United Kingdom, GE Healthcare is a unit of General Electric Company (NYSE: GE). Worldwide, GE Healthcare employees are committed to serving healthcare professionals and their patients in more than 100 countries. For more information about GE Healthcare, visit our website at [www.gehealthcare.com](http://www.gehealthcare.com).

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