

# Case Study >>>>

## NextGen Solutions Meet the Changing Technology Needs of Ophthalmology/Optical Practice

Since 1984, Eye Physicians & Surgeons of Chicago (EPSC) has served the ophthalmology and optometry needs of patients in Chicago and Skokie, IL. Two full-time ophthalmologists, three and a half part-time ophthalmologists, and one full-time optometrist rotate between the offices to care for about 19,000 patients every year.

By 2003, however, the practice had a problem. It was running an ophthalmology practice management solution from Prism Data Systems, Inc. (acquired by InfoCure) that worked well for many years. However, the system had no optical functionality, and no medical record component. The hardware was rapidly becoming obsolete. When Prism announced plans to sunset the system, EPSC went shopping for a new solution.

“We had three primary criteria for a new practice management solution,” notes Barry Herst, M.D., EPSC partner and Section Chief of Ophthalmology at St. Joseph Hospital in Chicago. “First, the vendor had to be stable and financially sound. Second, the system had to have functionality for both optical and ophthalmology. Third, there had to be an electronic health record component that, eventually, could integrate with the practice management solution.”

The 2003 annual meeting of the American Academy of Ophthalmology™ provided an opportunity to scout out several practice management vendors. EPSC narrowed its selection to two vendors, one of which was NextGen Healthcare, and requested demonstrations.



### Overview

#### PRACTICE

Eye Physicians and Surgeons of Chicago  
www.eyechicago.com

#### PRACTICE PROFILE

The physicians and staff of Eye Physicians and Surgeons of Chicago (EPSC) are ophthalmology, optometry, and optical leaders. Established in 1984, the six-member practice offers a wide range of eye care services—such as glaucoma procedures and cataract surgery—using state-of-the-art technology at its two offices, located in Chicago and Skokie, IL.

#### BUSINESS PROBLEM

An outdated practice management system lacked functionality to support the optical services offered by this ophthalmology group. The system was written on a legacy platform that was fast becoming technologically obsolete, and could not integrate with an electronic health record (EHR). When the vendor decided to sunset the application, EPSC knew it had to find a new practice management system. What it hoped to find was a robust system that eventually could integrate with an EHR for a complete clinical, financial, and operational solution.

#### SOLUTION

Eye Physicians and Surgeons of Chicago went live on NextGen® Practice Management software in January 2004 and implemented NextGen® Ambulatory EHR software a few months later.

#### PRODUCT DISTINCTIONS

- Interface capability to ophthalmic equipment
- Disease management templates specific to ophthalmology
- Reporting functionality that enables outcomes analysis
- Automated workflow tasking that saves time and enhances care

#### CLIENT BENEFITS

- Reduced dictation time by 1-2 hours each week
- Simplified and accelerated referral documentation
- Fostered a stronger referral base
- Earned medical malpractice premium discounts

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"We liked both systems," says Herst, "but at the time, NextGen Healthcare had an edge: template-based records rather than a tree-based solution." With templates, Herst and his colleagues could document more naturally via check boxes and free text, rather than being limited to a pre-set decision tree. So in September of 2003, EPSC signed a contract for the NextGen Practice Management system and NextGen Ambulatory EHR. By January 1, 2004, NextGen Practice Management was up and running.

"It was easy to install, seamless to deploy, and the practice staff liked it better than the Prism system they formerly loved," says Herst. The EHR was implemented the same year.

### Taking a Leap of Faith

NextGen Healthcare met EPSC's criteria for a fully integrated solution, but at the time the ophthalmology practice was sold primarily on the strength of the Practice Management system. "So much has changed since 2003. NextGen Healthcare was more heavily focused on the Practice Management side back then. Now, of course, NextGen Ambulatory EHR is just as strong a part of the package," explains Herst.

EPSC purchased the NextGen Ambulatory EHR knowing the company planned further development of its ophthalmology solution. Meanwhile, NextGen Healthcare sent a trainer to the Chicago practice and for three days showed Herst and a technician how to use the template editor. The practice then took the ophthalmology templates—which are flexible enough to allow customization if desired—and set to work developing its own ophthalmology/optical templates. EPSC soon was ready to bring up an ophthalmology/optical-specific NextGen Ambulatory EHR that everyone in the practice would use immediately. Or so Herst thought.

EHR vendors agree that no more than ten percent of ophthalmologists currently use an EHR<sup>1</sup>. Many, in fact, believe the percentage of EHR users is still fewer than seven percent. At first, it didn't appear that EPSC was going to change the trend.

### Proving EHR value

Throughout the entire selection and implementation process, Herst was the physician who led the charge. The others, a little more wary of the technology, wanted assurance that the new processes would not slow down workflow.

"My partners just said 'no'," says Herst. They didn't believe the EHR could be faster than using paper. "They told me I could forge ahead if I wanted to, but they weren't coming on board until they knew for certain the EHR would be at least as fast as the paper chart."

So Herst went first. The system immediately made a significant difference in one very important workflow aspect—dictation and reports to referring physicians. Without NextGen Ambulatory EHR, each of the ophthalmologists spent an hour or two each week dictating letters back to referring physicians. Those letters would then have to be typed, proofed, and mailed, in a process that typically took about a week. If all went well, a referring physician received the correspondence about ten days after the patient visit.



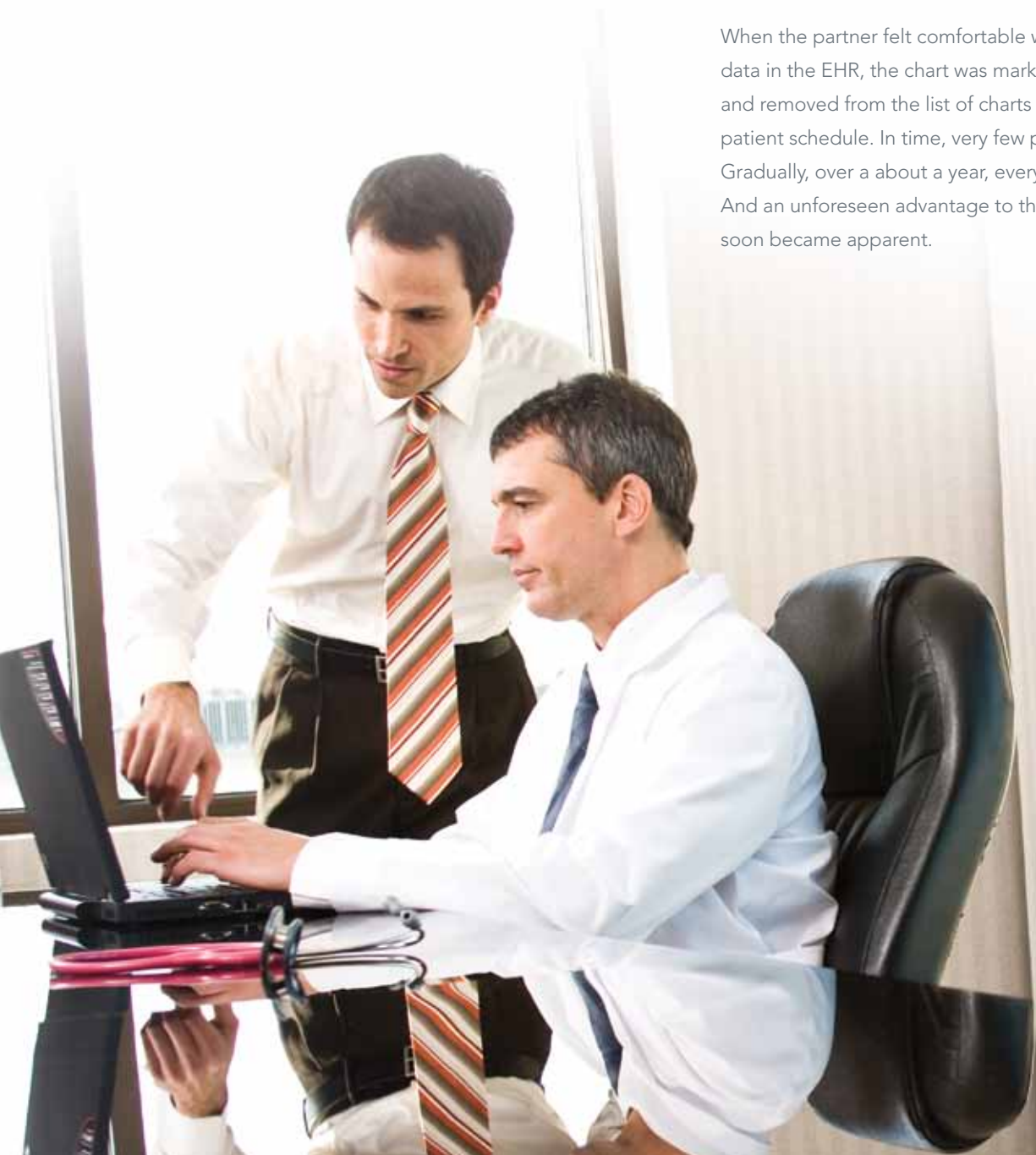
1. Jones S. EMR: Wider Adoption is Expected: Improving systems should drive demand. Ophthalmology Management. August 2004

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With NextGen® software, Herst discovered a substantial time savings. Dictation is now a thing of the past; once the patient visit is complete, he simply presses a key and any necessary referral letters are created and emailed. While using templates to document the exam proved just a shade slower at first, it didn't compare with the time and cost savings afforded by just the dictation workflow alone. Within a week, the other EPSC physicians were convinced. They decided to give the system a try.

But what to do about the old charts? EPSC decided to keep the existing charts, scanning into the EHR only the last two office visits, test results, and referral notes. Each chart was marked with a sticker to indicate that was now incomplete, but the missing information was in the EHR. Each partner was allowed to pull charts until he felt comfortable going straight to the EHR, a practice that continued longer for some physicians than others. Some physicians pulled paper charts for the first visit or two; others for five or six visits.

When the partner felt comfortable with the amount of data in the EHR, the chart was marked with a red sticker and removed from the list of charts to pull for each day's patient schedule. In time, very few paper charts were pulled. Gradually, over a about a year, everyone shifted to the EHR. And an unforeseen advantage to the practice's referral base soon became apparent.



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## Referrals become an unexpected bonus

It turns out that the same time-saving benefit that brought all of the EPSC physicians on-board the EHR transition was also fulfilling an unknown need for referring physicians. “We started getting a lot of referrals from new sources we’d never even met,” says Herst. “Our referral base was growing about 10 percent a year.”

EPSC soon discovered it was the only ophthalmology practice with an EHR on the north side of Chicago. “Once word got around that our exam reports are sent to referring physicians even before patients leave the office, primary care physicians (PCPs) started sending their patients to us. They’re now being incentivized for documentation of services such as eye exams for diabetic patients. With us, they know they’ll immediately have the necessary documentation for their own files.”

## The Now and Future EHR

Today, EPSC continues to profit from the efficiencies gained through its EHR and Practice Management integration. If a patient cancels or reschedules an appointment, for instance, front desk staff simply use a template that pops up in the physician’s in-box to alert him of the situation. While seemingly minor, this ability carries tremendous patient care implications. For the first time, EPSC physicians can follow up on no-shows to be sure they don’t “fall through the cracks.”

In addition to better patient care, it also aids in risk management efforts. Perhaps, for example, a glaucoma patient fails to present for a procedure. The physician can send a certified letter to the patient regarding the risks. After reviewing capabilities such as these, in fact, the group’s medical malpractice carrier provides an annual two percent premium discount.

For other ophthalmology practices wishing to experience the benefits of similar integration, Herst suggests setting a realistic timeline and implementing one system at a time. Despite significant advancements since EPSC implemented practice management and EHR software, Herst recommends giving the practice time to adjust to one solution before diving into the other.

He also points to the value of enthusiasm. “At least one person should be enthusiastic about implementing the EHR,” he says. “Change—even good change—is difficult. It helps to have a champion who can push or pull everyone else along.”

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For full information about the features and functions of NextGen Healthcare’s products and services, please contact us at [www.nextgen.com/contact](http://www.nextgen.com/contact).

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