

Case Study >>>>

NextGen Product Suite Helps Cardiology Group Increase Revenue, Referrals, and Productivity

Technological innovation is a tradition at Dallas-based cardiology group HeartPlace. To ensure the health of its patients, the practice long ago began introducing diagnostic technology such as coronary angiography, angioplasty, coronary stenting, and electrophysiology. To ensure the health of the business, HeartPlace more recently began looking to information technology (IT).

"Automation was the only way we could hope to become a cardiology practice of the future," explains Business Office Director Danny Conaway.

With the goal of better managing workflow, billing, and other business aspects of the practice, the 27-location group installed the NextGen® Practice Management solution in 2002. During the vetting process, however, HeartPlace also kept a careful eye on each vendor's electronic health record (EHR). Even then, this forward-thinking practice recognized the evolving direction of technology.

The group already understood the potential benefits of NextGen® Ambulatory EHR when the time came to move forward with an electronic record. Today, NextGen Practice Management and NextGen Ambulatory EHR solutions are working together to help HeartPlace increase revenue, improve physician productivity, and significantly reduce costs.

Overview

PRACTICE

HeartPlace
www.heartplace.com

PRACTICE PROFILE

With more than 70 physicians and 27 locations, Dallas-based HeartPlace is the largest cardiology group in North Texas—and the third largest in the country. Founded almost 50 years ago, HeartPlace has been an innovator in cardiovascular services, introducing procedures to its patients such as coronary angiography, angioplasty, coronary stenting, and electrophysiology.

BUSINESS PROBLEM

A proponent of technology, HeartPlace sought an integrated practice management and EHR platform that would help increase physician revenue and productivity while decreasing the number of support staff.

SOLUTION

HeartPlace went live on NextGen® Practice Management in 2002 and first implemented NextGen® Ambulatory EHR in 2006. The practice also serves as a beta site for NextGenSM Health Information Exchange.

PRODUCT DISTINCTIONS

- Automated, real-time tasking for improved practice efficiencies
- More than 400 cardiology-specific templates
- Easy exchange of data with other community participants, including practices with a non-NextGen EHR or none at all.

CLIENT BENEFITS

- Approximately \$257,000 in savings from enhanced efficiencies and reduced FTEs
- Access to extensive cardiology content, and the capability to develop customized content, as desired
- Improved documentation and smoother charge passing
- Automated referrals and acquisition of test results
- Well-poised for ongoing technology advances with Health Information Exchange solution

NEXTGEN
HEALTHCARE



Profiting from productivity

Currently, cardiology is a specialty caught between the “rock” of an aging population’s increased need for services and the “hard place” of declining reimbursement. From bundled CPT® codes to declining relative value units (RVUs), cardiology practices are earning less money for performing more services.

“The business is out there,” says Conaway. “The challenge is in making money doing it.” To which IT Director, Dallas Koeppel, responds, “Your money and your efficiency come from your practice management system.” Nowhere is this more evident than the large efficiency gains HeartPlace experienced from NextGen Practice Management’s tasking functionalities.

The solution’s WorkLog Manager, for instance, organizes and generates tasks automatically, while also tracking their completion. Specifically, HeartPlace uses WorkLog to assign tasks when specific “events” occur (such as an appointment made, claim sent, or information missed). When a task is finished, new tasks populate to continue the flow of work.

This automated tasking has allowed HeartPlace to reassign resources. Using WorkLog for insurance verification, for example, has reduced staff from 14 to eight full time employees (FTEs). In addition, by tying reason code libraries to follow-up tasks, payment-posting staff dropped from six to three. Total annual savings? About \$257,000.



Adding the EHR

Still, “profitability rides on the back of physician productivity,” says Koeppel. Keeping this thought in mind, a few years after adopting its NextGen Practice Management, HeartPlace began the search for an EHR solution that would:

- share a single database with its practice management system;
- include cardiology-specific applications and templates;
- enable participation in such initiatives as PQRI and e-prescribing; and
- move the practice toward meeting Meaningful Use criteria.

Another key consideration in HeartPlace’s EHR choice: cardiology expertise. Not only did NextGen Ambulatory EHR offer a large number of cardiology-specific templates, it also gave HeartPlace the flexibility to customize its own. With other vendors, customization required out-of-house consultants. In addition, NextGen Healthcare was the only solution provider that demonstrated a fully implemented cardiology site to provide real-life examples of future performance potential. With these and other factors to back the selection of NextGen Ambulatory EHR, HeartPlace began its training and implementation process. Responding to its physicians’ need for specific templates—and taking full advantage of the opportunity to customize their own templates—the practice first devoted the time necessary to craft them to meet their physicians’ clinical requirements.

Once the templates were complete, and about eight weeks before actual implementation, providers began receiving two hours of training each week. Implementation itself was a three-step process, according to EHR training coordinator Kelli Bourquin. It began with rolling out to a single clinic. Next, cardiology testing templates were rolled out to all clinics, giving providers exposure to the system without disrupting their workflow. Finally, the entire system was rolled out to all clinics.

Smoothing the clinical transition

No matter what the technology, HeartPlace understands that physician involvement is key to a successful implementation. “If physicians aren’t happy, staff isn’t happy,” Koeppe notes. Physician buy-in to the EHR implementation was gained through meetings that allowed physicians to discuss their involvement and feelings toward both the technology and its implementation.

They were also given input into the patient data that would be moved from paper charts into the EHR. A physician committee was charged with defining a minimum data set—referred to as the “master note”—that would make the transition.

Abstracting was done in advance as patients scheduled appointments, and was not a task delegated to only a few. Everyone, in fact—from front desk staff to managers—performed abstracting. The goal was to give everyone a hands-on opportunity to learn how to navigate the system. As a result, when a new patient walks into a HeartPlace location today, anyone in the clinic can pick up the chart and abstract the data, without interrupting patient flow.

About one month prior to actual implementation, physicians started practicing EHR use on a couple of patients at a time in “mock go-lives,” and gradually increased the number. By the time of actual go-live, most physicians already were comfortable using the system. Still, to make implementation easier, physicians carried only half-loads for the first week. By week number two, they were back to full speed.

Results realized

The EHR has many business benefits in addition to clinical advantages, adds Bourquin. Improved documentation and smoother charge passing—from EHR, through practice management and billing, is critical.

One good example: Payable diagnosis codes. With both the Practice Management and EHR in place, HeartPlace enjoys greater coding accuracy. Better capture of diagnosis in the EHR flows through to back-end edits in the Practice Management system, ensuring the inclusion of the payable diagnosis code on the bill. “With the integrated NextGen® solution, roughly 80 percent of claims are paid within 20 days,” says Conaway.

To aid clinical data capture, HeartPlace continues to work with NextGen Healthcare to create templates for such things as echoes, nuclear procedures, and vascular specialties. Today, nearly 50 percent of HeartPlace physicians use the template structure exclusively for documentation, eliminating the need for transcription.

And saving time, says Koeppe, is what technology does best. With the EHR, physicians can look up test results in the lab interface, automatically fax results and use electronic prescribing. According to Koeppe, “In our pre-EHR days, we sometimes had six or eight people looking for a lost chart. That just doesn’t happen now that everyone uses NextGen Ambulatory EHR.”



Technology can also improve profit and escalate overall productivity by attracting new physicians. To this end, HeartPlace served as a beta site for the NextGen Health Information Exchange (HIE), which links healthcare organizations to practices, hospitals, and other healthcare entities for secure data exchange.

There's "real competition out there for referrals," notes Koeppe, and some practices now base their referral decisions on the quality and speed of the referral documentation they receive. With NextGen HIE, HeartPlace physicians can send complete documentation to receiving physicians even before a patient leaves the office. At least one family practice is promising HeartPlace its business based on its ability to link back electronically.

But old habits die hard, warns Koeppe. "Initially, we tried to modify EHR workflow to fit the paper-based process. That didn't make a whole lot of sense." What did make sense, he explains, was analyzing workflow and identifying ways to take advantage of the inherent capabilities of the EHR. Over the ensuing years, that is exactly what HeartPlace has done. With the workflow efficiencies it has created, the practice firmly believes it could add another 25 physicians to its staff, and support them with the automation now in place.

Thinking back, looking ahead

For other practices implementing an EHR, HeartPlace offers these words of experienced advice:

- 1) Start early. Allowing yourself plenty of time for any large endeavor—IT or otherwise—simply eases the process,
- 2) Make sure all of the data you want is in the system at go-live.
- 3) Plan ahead to get information into the system efficiently, and present it in a format physicians like. Don't incur the headache of last-minute abstracting and data scanning.
- 4) EHR is not an IT-only project—to be successful the entire group from the Board room to the Medical Records staff needs to be involved.

Understand that, initially, implementation activities such as scanning and abstracting add a lot of work and often some cost. But that is not a reflection on the potential of the technology. "Don't be shocked at initial cost. That's only temporary," Koeppe assures.

It's the benefits that have real staying power. For HeartPlace, NextGen Ambulatory EHR has enhanced clinical care. NextGen Practice Management has improved billing. Implementing the two together has streamlined workflow and increased revenue. And now, as a beta site for NextGen HIE (formerly, NextGen Community Health Solution), the practice looks to extend the benefits of its IT innovation into the future. For HeartPlace, IT innovation and integration are the foundation of practice success.

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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.

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