

Case Study >>>>

Busy orthopedics practice turns to NextGen Healthcare for robust EHR and all-electronic billing

No practice can afford the administrative costs of ineffective billing and claims management. A turbulent economy, coupled with the uncertainties of healthcare reform, makes revenue cycle management a higher priority than ever before. Like most practices, the Orthopaedic Group of San Francisco recognized the need for electronic billing and claims processing, but in 2007, its existing electronic health record (EHR) and practice management software weren't ideal. Selected by a former employee, they were functioning as an electronic clearinghouse for dictated physicians' notes, but not much more.

"The legacy system wasn't meeting our needs on the medical records side or on the business side," explains Laura Sciaroni, MD, one of six orthopedic surgeons practicing at the Orthopaedic Group. "The templates were useless and impossible to customize. Physicians were still dictating notes, and the practice was still spending money on transcription."

Perhaps more importantly, it was awkward for doctors to access patient information at the point of care. "As a physician, I need to be able to see at a glance what shoulder range of motion was at the patient's last visit, for example, to compare it to the visit in progress," says Sciaroni, who specializes in shoulder and knee surgery. "If it takes six clicks to get to that data, and then even more clicks to get back to where I need to enter it in today's note, that's a problem."



Overview

PRACTICE

Orthopaedic Group of San Francisco

PRACTICE PROFILE

From offices in San Francisco and Daly City, the six orthopedic surgeons who comprise the Orthopaedic Group of San Francisco diagnose and treat diseases of the muscles, joints, nerves, and bones. Services include total joint replacement, arthroscopy, sports medicine, fracture care, and spine care for patients of all ages.

BUSINESS PROBLEM

A legacy EHR and practice management solution wasn't much more than a clearinghouse for dictated physicians' notes. It lacked reporting capability, templates were rigid, and billing staff complained about the lack of functionality. On top of everything else, the vendor's technical support was weak.

BUSINESS SOLUTION

Seamless integration between NextGen® EHR and Practice Management solutions, plus easy customization of templates and reports helped the practice improve patient care, communicate better with professional colleagues, and gain control over the revenue cycle.

PRODUCT DISTINCTIONS

- Flexible reports and templates
- Seamless integration between EHR and Practice Management system
- Easy to learn and use for front office staff, billing office, and physicians
- Seamless integration with clearinghouse solution

BENEFITS

- Improved access to patient data at the point of care
- Prompt, all-electronic billing
- Improved revenue cycle management
- Staff overtime hours reduced by one-third

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Reporting was also problematic, often requiring hundreds of printed pages to get pertinent data. The system's billing component was so user-unfriendly that all bills, except those to Medicare, went out on paper. At one point, the office manager approached Dr. Sciaroni with her concerns. For her, it was an uphill battle to generate reports and train new staff on the software. Furthermore, the office staff—four full-time and two part-time employees—spent many hours a day scanning operative reports and other documents to be imported into patient records. Frequently, there was so much paper to manage that the staff worked overtime to keep up.

These complaints, compounded by the vendor's unresponsive technical support, prompted the decision to search for an integrated and robust EHR and practice management solution.

Billing manager recommends NextGen Healthcare

The selection team, comprised of Dr. Sciaroni and the office administrator, investigated five potential vendors in search of a system with flexible reporting and templates. Among them was NextGen Healthcare. The three key criteria against which all the vendors were measured:

- 1) Simplicity of integration with the practice management software, as well as clearinghouse solutions;
- 2) Customization capacity for templates and documents;
- 3) Ease of training for billing staff.

After evaluating all the contenders, the team agreed that NextGen Healthcare would be the easiest to use and customize. It was also the only software solution able to marry template notes with practice letterhead and a physician's signature—a high priority for the Orthopaedic Group. As most specialty practitioners do, the surgeons frequently communicate with referring colleagues who expect timely patient updates. With a significant number of patients filing Workers' Compensation claims, the practice also corresponds regularly with insurance companies and attorneys.

"Collaboration with our patients' primary care physicians is among our top priorities," says Dr. Sciaroni. "They expect a professional-looking document that reads like a doctor's note, and NextGen Healthcare's ability to deliver that was a key factor in our decision to purchase the software."



“I now have clinical information from past visits easily available at the point of care. A/R days have dropped from 30 to 10-15. Denials due to our own mistakes are down by about 50%.”

Laura Sciaroni, MD
Orthopedic Surgeon

Expert support eases implementation

By July 2008, the Orthopaedic Group of San Francisco was live on both NextGen EHR and Practice Management solutions. As with any implementation, there were minor bumps in the road, but nothing that NextGen Healthcare support technicians couldn't resolve quickly over the phone.

“We had access to a number of experts in various areas as well as a dedicated project manager. They all addressed our issues in a timely manner,” recalls Dr. Sciaroni. “The support team worked closely with us to customize EHR templates for our practice.”

A comprehensive training program also facilitated the changeover. Physicians and office staff both participated in preliminary online instruction, followed by a two-day, on-site session led by one NextGen Healthcare trainer dedicated to EHR and another for Practice Management.

To reduce impact on accounts receivable (A/R) during implementation, the office manager assigned half her billing staff to work in the old system and half in the new, gradually switching team members to NextGen software, one by one. Scheduling about half the normal volume of office visits during the first week on the new EHR minimized the impact on patient care.

“We were prepared to cut office visit volume in half for two weeks, but after the first week we were ready to resume a normal workload,” says Dr. Sciaroni. “In about a month, everyone in the billing office was up to speed on claims.”

Within a year after going live on NextGen, the Orthopaedic Group was electronically billing claims to all payers—and filing them within 48 hours of an office visit, as opposed to a delay of up to two weeks prior to the NextGen software implementation. Thanks in part to a smooth interface with the practice's Web-based clearinghouse solution, the rate of claims denial has fallen substantially. The denials still received come in faster and are resolved promptly.

The overwhelming majority—90%—of physicians are now charting at full speed, entering charges immediately following the patient visit and electronically submitting codes to the business office through NextGen Practice Management software. This process improvement, combined with all-electronic billing, adds up to significantly improved A/R aging and an accelerated revenue cycle.

The time savings afforded by these improvements allows for greater focus on quality care initiatives. “We were able to put our office staff through a customer service training program,” notes Dr. Sciaroni. “With the previous system, they would never have had time for that.”

Side-by-side clinical comparisons only a click away

Physicians are enthusiastic about the ability of the NextGen EHR to deliver side-by-side comparisons of a patient's condition from previous encounters. The EHR notes template automatically populates with patient history, symptoms, and other data from previous visits so doctors can quickly assess a patient's progress.

And because they no longer have to dictate the entire note, physicians have more time to spend with patients. “I can dictate three or four sentences at the beginning, click through the templates, and wind up with a few sentences at the end,” says Dr. Sciaroni.

Communication with professional colleagues has also improved. Not only can doctors easily generate authoritative letters, but they can also automatically fax notes—directly from the EHR—to referring physicians and Workers' Compensation claims adjusters.

"This is a single mouse-click for me, and one less task our office staff has to do. Plus, claims adjusters and workers' compensation nurses love getting their information immediately," Dr. Sciaroni reports. "For me, customization was very important," she adds. "Now, it doesn't take me any more time to create a report in the required workers' compensation format than it does to document an office encounter for a private pay patient. I don't want to send a note that looks like everyone else's note, either. Other vendors had decent notes, but they couldn't customize them to the extent that NextGen Healthcare could."

Patient care and business benefits shine bright

The decision to replace a clunky legacy system with one that seamlessly integrates medical records, billing, claims, and communications has paid off well for the Orthopaedic Group of San Francisco. Business processes are running smoothly; Dr. Sciaroni says about half her notes are coded at the conclusion of each visit, while the other half is completed within an hour or two.

As a result, the practice has saved about \$25,000 per year on transcription costs, despite the fact that it has added two doctors. "I'd estimate that real savings are \$40,000 per year, if we were to compare costs based on the same number of physicians we had prior to implementing NextGen software."

Denials and receivables also have improved. "Basically, we went from billing claims once a week to billing out two to three days per week electronically. Our average time from billing to payment has dropped from 30 days to 10-15 days. Denials due to mistakes on our side are down by about 50%."

But, even better, Dr. Sciaroni reports that physicians now have easy access to pertinent information at the time of service. "What's most important is that I now have clinical information from past visits easily available at the point of care. It's so beneficial to patient care to have those clinical details handy."

With business metrics and patient care both at peak performance, the Orthopaedic Group of San Francisco feels well-equipped to handle future needs.

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