

Case Study >>>>

Neurosurgery Practice Enhances Data Access and Reporting while Enabling Positive Growth

For Carolina Neurosurgery & Spine Associates (CNSA), patient data became increasingly time-consuming to capture, and useful reports grew more and more cumbersome to create. As a result, the practice needed a more efficient method to collect critical patient information and a more sophisticated means to generate information-rich reports. The practice also sought to reduce the escalating costs associated with its continued growth.

To address these requirements, in 2001, CNSA assigned an internal team of directors, managers, clinicians, and physicians—led by CNSA Information Systems/Managed Care Director, Pam Saunders—to closely evaluate practice management and electronic health record (EHR) solutions.

Saunders explains, “We were looking for a combined enterprise practice management (EPM), EHR, and document management solution. As a Microsoft shop, we wanted a Windows-based, user-friendly solution delivering easy integration with our existing network. We needed to reduce our number of interfaced applications and avoid making hardware/structural changes in our practice. Finding a solution tailored to the needs of a neurosurgery practice was critical—as was the ability to customize the solution moving forward. NextGen Healthcare was one of the few companies delivering a progressive, integrated solution. And, it was the only solution that effectively addressed all of our needs.”

Executive Director at CNSA, Mary Cloninger, adds, “Our practice is highly dependent on capturing and reporting data—and we needed to generate new types of reports in several key areas. For example, we wanted to better track reimbursement data and trace the types/quantities of tests scheduled. With NextGen software, we could generate more accurate data and reports by automatically incorporating Relative Value Units (RVUs) specific to Current Procedural Terminology (CPT) codes.”

Overview

PRACTICE

Carolina Neurosurgery & Spine Associates
Charlotte (2 offices), Huntersville, and
Concord, NC—as well as Rock Hill, SC
www.cnsa.com

PRACTICE PROFILE

Carolina Neurosurgery & Spine Associates is one of the oldest and largest neurosurgical practices in the country. The practice features 18 board-certified or board-eligible neurosurgeons, 5 board-certified physiatrists, 19 mid-level providers, and a staff of physical therapists. The team provides advanced surgical and non-surgical treatment for the entire spectrum of brain, spine, and peripheral nerve disorders.

BUSINESS PROBLEM

Carolina Neurosurgery & Spine Associates needed a more efficient method to capture critical patient data and a more sophisticated means to generate information-rich reports. The practice also sought to reduce the escalating costs associated with its continued growth.

SOLUTION

Implemented NextGen® EPM in 2004—and went live on NextGen® EHR solution one year later. The practice also implemented NextGen Healthcare’s Image Control System (ICS). Plus, it utilizes interfaces enabling the importation of dictation into NextGen EHR.

PRODUCT DISTINCTIONS

- Improved/more secure access to patient data
- Neurosurgery-specific content and modules
- Better clinical documentation and coding
- Comprehensive interfacing

BENEFITS

- Eliminated paper for enhanced efficiency/scheduling
- Better documentation/information access/reporting
- Reduced administrative FTEs
- Increased revenue/cut costs
- Gained neurosurgery-specific content
- Achieved outstanding support

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Selecting a proven, integrated solution

After several site visits to existing NextGen Healthcare customers, CNSA was sold on the company's integrated solution. The practice has been up and running with NextGen EPM since 2004—and went live on NextGen EHR solution one year later. CNSA also implemented NextGen Healthcare's Image Control System (ICS), which indexes, stores, and manages all scanned documents within the NextGen system. Finally, CNSA utilizes interfaces enabling the importation of dictation into NextGen EHR.

CNSA Physiatrist, Dr. John A. Welshofer, offers insight on the implementation, "The more open you are to change—and the more prepared you are for it—the faster you'll adjust. You don't have to be a computer guru, which I'm not, to use NextGen software. That said, our IT team did a great job ramping me up as our initial user. On my first day using the system, I didn't reduce my schedule by one patient."

Meeting neurosurgery-specific needs for ongoing positive growth

In choosing NextGen software, CNSA realized a significant improvement in efficiency and improved patient care. As Welshofer attests, "The biggest benefit our NextGen solution delivers is the standardization of patient care, which improved our overall care delivery. By phasing out paper charts, we're eliminating the potential for charts to go missing, which also improves patient care." In addition, the practice achieved the following key benefits as a result of its partnership with NextGen Healthcare:

Enhanced efficiency/scheduling

Prior to using the NextGen system, CNSA could not quantify tasks and procedures referred out of the practice. "Today, I can quickly and easily pull information about procedures performed inside and outside our facility, which enables better, faster patient care and more effective revenue tracking. Now, we know exactly how many scans, tests, and procedures are ordered, so as we grow, we will know our needs, and can better identify potential revenue opportunities. Plus, when it comes to surgery scheduling, tracking procedure authorizations through insurance companies is now much easier—and more thorough—thanks to automation," says Cloninger.

The CNSA triage department—established post-NextGen implementation—further expedites care delivery. "Nurses access data directly from NextGen software without pulling charts. Communication templates are easily retrievable, and everybody shares them," says Saunders.

Finally, with the NextGen system, patient visits are expedited through the automation of the check-in and check-out process, as well as through improved documentation during exams and procedures. Welshofer adds, "With NextGen software, my staff is much more efficient. I considered our team to be a well-oiled machine before, and now we're even more so."



Better documentation and information access

CNSA is in the process of destroying its paper charts. Consequently, the practice reduced its full-time employees in the medical records department by one staff member and reassigned the other members of the department to new roles. Existing team members are now expediting medical records services that CNSA used to outsource. As a result, the department is generating revenue. "Looking forward, we anticipate transitioning paper storage spaces into revenue-generating space," confirms Saunders.

Welshofer continues, "I've been practicing medicine since 1994, and I've tried quite a few electronic systems at other practices. With the NextGen solution, it is easier to document patient information and access it both on- and off-site. Now, we can more easily record and track medication information, utilize tasking features to streamline communications, automate interactions with referral physicians, electronically review radiology reports and physical therapy notes, and interface seamlessly with Dragon® dictation software."

What's more, with NextGen software, CNSA has a stronger, more efficient database for improved reporting. For example, if an insurance company contests a claim, the practice can easily pull records and gather necessary data. What's more, via its NextGen EHR solution, CNSA enjoys instantaneous online access to medical records. "Case workers are consistently blown away that patient notes are immediately available after a patient appointment," comments Welshofer.

Cloninger concludes, "When it comes to capturing data, we can be very creative with NextGen software. This helps us with strategic planning and in maximizing reimbursement. We can look at our managed care compensation outcomes, and when we negotiate a contract, we can have the right information on hand for the best possible outcome."

Increased revenue/cut costs

CNSA noticed an immediate impact in its billing department after its NextGen implementation. Denise Ellis, Finance Director at CNSA, comments, "When we started with NextGen software in 2004, we were at 54.26 days in Accounts/Receivable (A/R). NextGen helped us reduce that time by 10 days (before going live with a new clearing house). Then, once we made the clearinghouse switch, we reduced A/R days even more to 38.94 by fiscal year end in April 2008. It's clear that the software's effective, automated coding truly helped us improve our A/R days and increase our revenue."

NextGen software also helped CNSA cut the costs of paper charts and transcription, while also keeping staffing costs down. "Even though we added five psychiatrists, four neurosurgeons, and eight physical therapists since implementing the NextGen solution, we have not hired a single additional administrative employee. I credit the software's automation of follow-up processes and electronic payment posting for enabling us to maximize our existing staff and gain cost savings," concludes Ellis.

Gained neurosurgery-specific content

With NextGen EHR, CNSA can access customizable neurosurgery specific templates, such as History of Present Illness (HPI) templates for such conditions like:

- Back pain
- Sciatica
- Hydrocephalus
- Trigeminal neuralgia
- Carotid artery disease

In addition, CNSA gained neurosurgery procedure templates for items such as:

- Nerve blocks
- Shunt maintenance (with age-specific content)
- Baclofen pump maintenance
- Lumbar puncture

Finally, CNSA benefits from quick post-op visit templates to help document patient encounters and neurosurgery assessments matched with ICD-9 codes for fast selection.

Helped to pass critical legislation

In North Carolina, prior to January 1, 2008, insurance companies could seek recoupment for refunds from medical practices for up to five years. "To reduce this time frame, medical societies and practices across the state of North Carolina decided to join efforts to help legislatively set limits on recoupment—and we were immediately on board. By tapping into the NextGen solution, we quickly identified refund requests that were over one year old and submitted this data to further illustrate the issue for the legislators," explains Saunders. As a result of their combined efforts, legislation was successfully passed setting a two-year time limit for recoupment.

Achieved outstanding support

"From a support standpoint, NextGen Healthcare is as highly responsive today as the company was when we first implemented the system—and we count on their ongoing expertise. The company's annual users' group meetings have been extremely helpful—each year, we are able to tailor our training to our knowledge-level and significantly upgrade our expertise," says Saunders.

A continuing partnership

CNSA is actively involved in helping to continually improve and enhance NextGen software templates. "We have a close working relationship with NextGen Healthcare, and the company has supported us as we make ongoing enhancements to the system geared at addressing the specific needs of our practice. It is great that both the company and the product are flexible enough to enable this," says Welshofer. Saunders adds, "We're excited to work with NextGen Healthcare to develop and beta test new brain-related templates."

Welshofer concludes, "Looking forward, we're eager to implement electronic fee tickets, maximize web portals for secure patient sites, tap into the advantages that come with pay-for-performance reporting, and benefit from the new features that NextGen Healthcare continually adds to its product."

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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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