

Case Study >>>>

Gastroenterology Practice Reduces Costs and Enhances Care Via NextGen EHR, EPM, and CHS

In early 2000, Huron Gastroenterology was a growing practice running out of space for its medical records files and expanding staff. As a result, the practice had several urgent goals. First, Huron needed to free up space and streamline communications. In addition, the practice sought ongoing ways to enhance overall patient care and improve patient data exchange with other providers.

To achieve these objectives, Huron began investigating electronic health records (EHR) software and enterprise practice management (EPM) software solutions. The practice sought an intuitive, highly functional, user-friendly technology solution from a financially stable company. Bobbi Sommers, Application Specialist at Huron Gastroenterology, explains, "Our evaluation committee—including doctors and administrative staff—paid particular attention to how well potential solutions would fit into our workflow. Also critical was ease of use, ongoing product development, customization capabilities, and interfacing functionality. Finally, we teamed with other practices in our area to explore potential community health solutions, which deliver a central data repository that enables users to securely exchange patient information."



Overview

PRACTICE

Huron Gastroenterology/ Center for Digestive Care
Ypsilanti, Michigan
www.hurongastro.com

PRACTICE PROFILE

Founded in 1971, the 15 physicians and 5 mid-level providers of Huron Gastroenterology provide comprehensive endoscopic and consultative services to meet patients' digestive health care needs.

BUSINESS PROBLEM

Huron Gastroenterology needed to free up space and streamline communications. In addition, the practice sought ongoing ways to enhance overall patient care, deliver better continuity of care, and improve patient data exchange with other providers in its area.

SOLUTION

Huron Gastroenterology implemented NextGen electronic health records software, NextGen enterprise practice management software, and NextGen Community Health Solution.

PRODUCT DISTINCTIONS

- Improved, more secure patient data access
- Better clinical documentation/coding
- Extensive clinical device interconnectivity
- Helps improve cash flow and productivity

BENEFITS

- Reduced staffing costs by \$641,000 over 4 years
- Cut \$159,000 annually by automating processes
- Save \$18,000 annually through improved billing
- Eliminated \$344,000 in transcription costs over 2 years
- Removed \$99,000 in paper storage fees over 3 years
- Gained 1.5% in CMS Medicare reimbursements for 2007 PQRI measures
- Improved physician productivity by up to 1½ hours a day
- Streamlined communications for faster, better patient care

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Building a strong community health solution

After closely examining several possible solutions, Huron chose a multi-faceted solution from NextGen Healthcare. Specifically, the practice is using NextGen® electronic health records (EHR) software, NextGen enterprise practice management (EPM) software, and NextGen Community Health Solution (CHS).

Sommers explains, “We were in the process of building a new office and surgery center at the time we were making our choice. We didn’t want to move paper charts with us, so finding the right EHR solution was extremely important. Then, two years after our successful NextGen EHR implementation, as the redundancies and lack of automation in our 20-year-old legacy practice management system became burdensome and restrictive, we decided to replace it with NextGen EPM. Now, we’ve eliminated paper charts and we can exchange data seamlessly—and more securely—with other local medical providers.”

Achieving cost and time savings while improving communications and patient care

Since implementing its NextGen Healthcare solution, Huron Gastroenterology enjoys the following benefits:

Cost savings and improved revenue

Since implementing NextGen software, Huron added 8 providers to its team without bringing additional support staff on board. Over the course of four years, this saved the practice \$641,000. What’s more, Huron actually reduced staff in some departments, such as medical records, clinical, and billing.

Sommers adds, “By customizing and automating processes using NextGen software—such as the generation of patient information packets—we saved \$159,000 this past year alone. That includes \$47,000 in mailing and printing costs. The practice also saves 8 hours of staff time daily on this task. In addition, NextGen software enables automatic letter creation when we notify patients of drug recalls—in fact, today the practice can generate 700 letters in 10 minutes, saving \$35,000 a year in costs.”

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By automating billing in its surgery center—in conjunction with its professional fee billing—Huron saves \$18,000 a year. When a patient is registered with the “office” side of the practice, data is automatically copied to the surgery center, as well. “This decreases rejections and saves man hours. Plus, cost savings will grow as the number of procedures increases,” explains Sommers.

By fully documenting patient visits using NextGen EHR, Huron completely eliminated transcription costs for savings of \$344,000 over the last two years. In addition, by eliminating paper charts, over the past three years, Huron saved \$99,000 in chart storage fees. Plus, the practice converted its old chart room to office space for four people.

By fulfilling Physician Quality Reporting Initiative (PQRI) requirements, Huron gained an additional 1.5% in CMS Medicare reimbursements. “The PQRI measurements are built directly into our clinical templates, so we can capture data with minimal effort,” says Sommers.



Time savings and productivity improvements

As Gastroenterologist, Dr. Narash Gunaratnam, explains, “Before implementing our NextGen solution, it could take up to 10 hours to respond to a patient phone call. With NextGen tasking and WorkLog manager, responses take one hour at most. My desk is no longer covered in post-it notes from my staff and piles of charts. Due to the efficiencies introduced by NextGen EHR, our physician productivity improved by up to one and a half hours a day. Our doctors have real-time access to patient information, making it easier to remotely interact with staff, dictate notes, sign off on labs, and access patient data. Now, I can get home to my family much sooner each night.”

Time savings with Huron’s NextGen solution are impressive. Previously, it took four hours to compile the documents necessary for the patient screening process. Now, with NextGen software, that process takes 20 minutes. Referral letters go out the same day, as opposed to Huron’s previous 7-14 day turnaround. And, Huron can process referral letters within one hour, rather than its previous turnaround time of 14 days. NextGen software’s WorkLog and tasking functionality helped Huron decrease its days in accounts receivable. “We can get claims out faster—and get paid faster—because our operations are more efficient,” explains Sommers.

Dr. Gunaratnam adds, “Workflow efficiency is dramatically improved. We do a large quantity of pathology and lab testing. There’s always a worry that a biopsy will be cancerous, so quick turn-around is ideal. Before implementing our NextGen solution, it took 5-7 days to receive pathology results and an additional 2-3 days turn-around time with transcription. Patients would have to wait 7-14 days for results. Now, with NextGen EHR, we can deliver pathology results as soon as the pathology is read. So, we typically get back to patient within hours or, at most, one day. Reporting on those results takes a mere 2-3 days.”

Enhanced patient care

With NextGen software, Huron can expedite patient encounters via extensive clinical device interconnectivity and—thanks to the software’s flexibility and customization capabilities—the practice can tailor its approach to patient care.

Dr. Gunaratnam explains, “Drug recalls—and reacting to them quickly—is a major concern for us. Our NextGen solution helped to make the process of notifying patients manageable. What’s more, NextGen software has improved our ability to deliver excellent patient care. For example, every gastroenterologist knows that certain vaccinations are critical for patients with chronic liver disease. However, only about 30% of experienced doctors make sure these patients get vaccinated for hepatitis A and B. NextGen software enabled us to develop automatic reminders which prompt us to order critical vaccines. It’s a simple intervention that truly improves care.”

In addition, NextGen helps ensure that lab requisitions happen automatically, and on the proper timeline. “Certain drugs require frequent lab tests due to toxicity risks. NextGen software helped to improve our compliance in this area, reducing our patients’ toxicity risks and improving their care.”

Better communications

With all of the success that Huron experienced with NextGen EHR and EPM, its biggest benefit has been from the NextGen CHS solution. “NextGen Healthcare listened to our feedback to help shape the CHS offering into something truly valuable. This offering enables us to bring radiology results from the hospital directly into NextGen EHR. We have greatly accelerated lab orders—and get results in real time. We’ve automated results notification, and can quickly and easily report on outcomes. In every aspect, communication among clinical providers and with patients is drastically improved,” says Sommers.

Dr. Gunaratnam concludes, “NextGen software’s open architecture allows us to write interfaces and enables seamless communication within our practice and with other medical providers. Also critical, because NextGen Healthcare invites feedback from customers, it has successfully grown its products over time, and continues to evolve in a positive direction.”


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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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CS-00003-04/09

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