

# Case Study >>>>

## A Clear Vision: MERSI adopts integrated IT systems to provide superior care and support unique clinical model

After working with the Massachusetts Eye and Ear Infirmary for nearly 30 years, C. Stephen Foster, M.D., F.A.C.S., F.A.C.R., decided in 2005 to open a private practice dedicated to delivering superior care, advancing clinical research, and training the next generation of forward-thinking ophthalmologists.

Dr. Foster, who is Clinical Professor of Ophthalmology at Harvard Medical School, initiated the process with a clear vision regarding the technology that would be required for success, establishing three specific criteria from the onset:

1. The selected systems had to support providers in their mission to deliver outstanding ophthalmology care. Dr. Foster determined that the practice should adopt an EHR system that integrated all available clinical information—including digital images and diagnostic tests—into a comprehensive patient record.
2. Any selected technology must enhance efficiency and productivity. Dr. Foster wanted to see 80 patients per day. Since the majority of the patient base presented with highly complex conditions, this meant the EHR system must streamline workflow and eliminate the “paper chase” of tracking down charts, test results, referral letters, and consultation reports. It sought technology that would help streamline administrative workflow processes as well.
3. The EHR and practice management systems adopted by MERSI must be configured to support specialized initiatives envisioned by Dr. Foster: advanced clinical research programs and a robust ocular immunology fellowship program serving the Harvard Medical School.

### Overview

#### PRACTICE

Massachusetts Eye Research and Surgery Institute (MERSI)  
Cambridge, MA

#### PRACTICE PROFILE

Specializing in cataract, corneal transplantation, glaucoma, macular degeneration, and ocular inflammatory diseases, such as Uveitis.

#### BUSINESS PROBLEM

Sought information technology that would seamlessly integrate practice management, electronic health records (with ophthalmology-specific content), and diagnostic imaging equipment.

#### SOLUTION

Implemented NextGen® EHR, NextGen® EPM, and NextGen® ICS software.

#### PRODUCT DISTINCTIONS

- Knowledge Base Model with ready-to-use ophthalmology-specific templates
- Integration between EHR system and diagnostic equipment
- Flexible functionality to reflect practice priorities and workflow

#### BENEFITS

- Improved quality of care for patients
- Ability to automatically incorporate diagnostic results into the health record
- Enhanced coding
- Comprehensive charge capture
- Elimination of transcription costs
- Increased efficiency and productivity



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## Seeking an integrated, proven solution

A strong proponent of health information technology, Dr. Foster had been reviewing and evaluating various systems for years prior to founding MERSI. Ultimately, he selected NextGen EHR, NextGen EPM, and NextGen ICS systems. The decision was based on the fact that NextGen systems are scalable and robust, yet easy to implement and use. In addition, NextGen Healthcare is a well-established, reputable vendor.

Dr. Foster had heard “horror stories” about colleagues who had implemented technology—only to find within a year or two that the company had gone out of business, leaving them with no support or capacity to develop content for emerging needs. A publicly traded company, NextGen Healthcare was established in 1994 and has worked with more than 1,200 multi-specialty practices throughout the country.

Dr. Foster began seeing patients in 2005 while his new office—which includes a complete infusion center—was under construction. So, early patient visits were documented in paper charts for a short time. While in its temporary location, MERSI worked with NextGen Healthcare to develop specialized clinic schedules and appointment functionality within NextGen EPM software. It deployed the system in April 2005, after about a week of on-site training. MERSI staff moved into the new location in July of that year, at which time it launched NextGen EHR software.

Prior to go-live, select personnel traveled to NextGen Healthcare facilities, undergoing “train-the-trainer” instruction, and returned to Cambridge to bring colleagues up-to-speed on the system. In addition, NextGen Healthcare provided on-site training for all clinical staff prior to implementation.

Before launching the NextGen EHR system, MERSI accomplished two significant tasks:

1. Customizing clinical templates to reflect its unique approach to ophthalmology care. NextGen EHR software utilizes a Knowledge Base Model (KBM), and the system arrived at MERSI pre-loaded with ophthalmology-specific templates, menus, and educational materials. This minimized the human and financial resources required to get the system “practice ready” so it could be used immediately upon deployment. However, because of the practice’s clinical focus on highly complex ocular inflammatory diseases, Dr. Foster took advantage of the system’s flexibility to customize templates and workflow.
2. Establishing baseline electronic records for the 1,000 patient visits before MERSI occupied its new offices. Staff scanned in each complete chart through the NextGen ICS system. As patients came into the office, staff took the time to obtain a detailed history and physical, which was expanded upon each time the patient was seen. MERSI found the transition to NextGen technology relatively simple, a fact practice leadership appreciates since the staff exhibits a wide range of technical skills. Dr. Foster credits NextGen software’s intuitive design and comprehensive training for the successful launch. Over the longer term, staff members at all levels of the practice have discovered the benefits NextGen systems have delivered.



## NextGen EHR Software

MERSI has found the clinical content of NextGen EHR software to be exemplary, and also finds the system's ability to import data from diagnostic equipment invaluable. Few specialties require the volume of diagnostic tests, measurements, and studies that ophthalmology does. NextGen EHR software provides seamless interfaces with digital imaging and testing devices such as the Humphrey visual field machine, IOL Master, corneal topography equipment, OCT machine, lensometers, and digital photography equipment.

MERSI notes that interfaces were ready to use once NextGen EHR software was deployed and that this functionality has greatly enhanced quality of care. For example, providers can pull images up in the exam room to consider during encounters and share them with patients as appropriate. Electronic charting and documentation provide additional value in three areas: optimizing revenue, verifying regulatory compliance, and supporting providers' actions in the event of malpractice charges. Because MERSI providers specialize in ocular inflammatory diseases, many of their patients require complex care that entails unusually long office visits and a wide variety of diagnostic and therapeutic services. From a medical claims perspective, this classifies MERSI as an outlier, since it reports larger than normal numbers of high-level E/M services and multiple procedure codes. NextGen EHR software allows the practice to ensure it has documented all work, so it can bill the services that reflect the care provided and justify its claims to insurers during an audit.

This documentation likewise supports MERSI providers in the event of litigation. During his career, Dr. Foster has been called upon to review records relevant to negligence lawsuits. In many instances, he found the accused provider to be on "soft ground" because documentation was not as thorough as it needed to be.

NextGen EHR software renders documentation virtually irrefutable because each template captures comprehensive information about all care provided.

Further, the NextGen EHR system's functionality has allowed MERSI staff to see more patients each day. Using personal computers in each exam room, ophthalmic technicians can now "work up" four patients an hour. Face time with the patient is also more productive. Notes are scribed and immediately input into the record using pick lists and drop-down boxes. Because dictation and note-taking is completed during a patient visit, staff and providers have less paperwork at the end of the day. Reports, letters, or other documents can be done quickly and efficiently through NextGen EHR software. MERSI staff (including Dr. Foster), in fact, are usually out the door by 5:30 or 6 PM each day. In addition to saving time, this functionality saves MERSI about \$1,500 a month in transcription costs.

NextGen EHR software also allows MERSI providers to more easily identify patients eligible for participation in research studies. The system enables staff to review patients scheduled to be seen the next day, identifying those with specific conditions and treatment histories who might be candidates for clinical research.

The system can also identify possible participants during an appointment. Triggers can be programmed into NextGen EHR software to alert the provider—in real time—about research opportunities. He or she can even be notified about what steps to avoid taking (e.g., administering a medication or initiating a treatment protocol) so they don't inadvertently render the patient ineligible. In addition, it helps MERSI manage the tremendous documentation and reporting functions associated with clinical research. With 30 years' experience as a researcher, Dr. Foster is all-too-familiar with the time- and resource-consuming demands of sorting through thousands of paper charts to extrapolate relevant data—a task he considers anachronistic in this age of advanced computing and efficient data processing. NextGen technology has allowed Dr. Foster, MERSI research fellows, and their staff to gather vital information and streamline analysis activities in a fraction of the time and with greater assurance of accuracy.

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## NextGen EPM Software

MERSI staff say they “absolutely love” the fact that the integrated systems provide a seamless flow of data. Whatever happens in the exam room is automatically in the back office—codes are input, charges are captured, and billing information is sent as soon as the provider closes the NextGen EHR system. This has saved MERSI significant time and resources and helps streamline revenue cycle management. Leadership has been able to avoid hiring 1.0 billing full-time equivalents (FTE) and 1.0 front desk FTE. Compensation would have totaled about \$45,000 and \$35,000 a year, respectively, for an \$80,000 savings overall.

Additionally, NextGen EPM software helps MERSI ensure it captures all charges. Studies have indicated that as much as 25% of diagnostic tests that are ordered by ophthalmologists are never billed. Orders are captured in NextGen EHR software and, when the test is performed, charges are immediately forwarded to NextGen EPM software to ensure timely billing. The NextGen EPM system also accommodates electronic remittance advice (ERA) from most of MERSI’s payers, including Blue Cross/Blue Shield and Medicare. This reduces the time staff members spend on posting, ensures posting is accurate and makes revenue information available more quickly.

NextGen EPM software supports robust reporting, too. The practice can “slice and dice” a wealth of data captured through the system in a wide variety of ways, analyzing trends relative to patient visits, new patients, no-shows, charges by provider, and more. Monthly reports let practice leadership know precisely what is happening throughout the practice. In addition, marketing analysis allows MERSI to keep abreast of what factors influence a patient’s decision to choose the facility and to target patient communications accordingly.

Overall, the providers and staff at MERSI couldn’t be happier with the integrated NextGen technology. The practice has realized concrete benefits in time savings and revenue enhancements and feels gratified that it is able to provide the highest quality ophthalmic care in the area.

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“We love the fact that NextGen EHR and NextGen EPM software are fully integrated. We have the assurance of knowing that coding is checked to ensure it accurately reflects the level of care delivered. In addition, all charges for diagnostic tests and other services are captured and automatically forwarded to billing.”

Scott Evans  
Administrator

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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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