

Case Study >>>

Small Practice Sees Big Gains with EHR

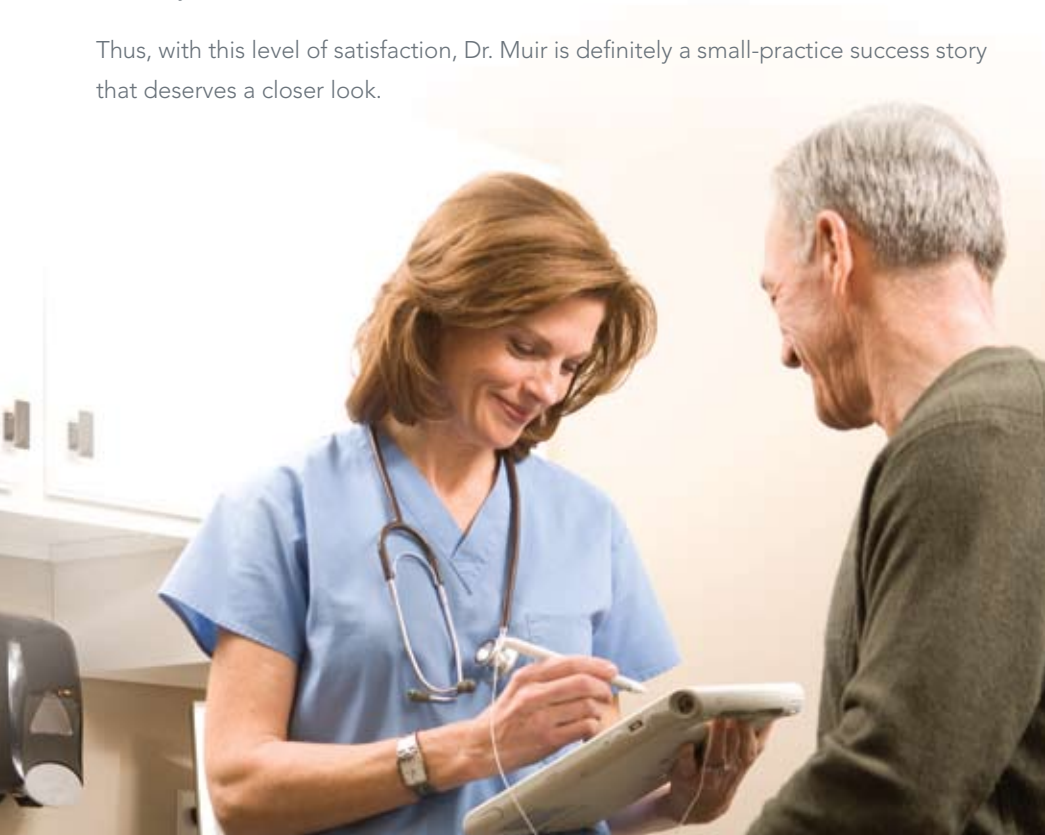
Peter Muir, MD, has heard all the arguments small practices make about why they're hesitant to implement an electronic health records (EHR) system: It's too costly. It's too complicated. It doesn't let me practice my way. It will slow me down.

But while he acknowledges these are issues to at least consider, he is convinced a thoughtful implementation plan can minimize any negatives while enhance the positives.

Dr. Muir, of Roberto, Roberto, Muir, Sutter, and Macy, in Springfield, Ohio, is using an EHR in a small-practice setting and knows first-hand all those arguments are weak. He has found it to be well worth the investment of time and financial and staff resources. Acting as the practice's IT department, he has been able to accomplish most objectives already. As to affecting his workflow, he found that the flexibility of the system he chose allowed him to tailor it perfectly to the office routine.

"The advantage of having a small practice, in fact," says Muir, "is that the system (NextGen EHR) is very user-oriented, so you can do whatever you want with it. You're definitely not tied to any rigid method. With a large practice, you might configure it for common practice methods and not with your preferences. With this system, the flexibility is out of this world."

Thus, with this level of satisfaction, Dr. Muir is definitely a small-practice success story that deserves a closer look.



Overview

PRACTICE

Roberto, Roberto, Muir, Sutter, and Macy
Springfield, OH

PRACTICE PROFILE

A five-physician primary care practice.

BUSINESS PROBLEM

Paper charts and poor access to data caused prolonged and inefficient office processes.

SOLUTION

Implemented NextGen® EHR software in 2003 and implemented NextGen® EPM software and lab interface in 2006.

PRODUCT DISTINCTIONS

- Knowledge Base Model for Family Practice
- Template editor
- Automated E&M coding

BENEFITS

- Transcription savings
- Fewer staff necessary
- Adapts to your workflow and preferences

NEXTGEN
HEALTHCARE INFORMATION SYSTEMS

Knowing What You Want

In the 1980s, when Dr. Muir first started practicing medicine, he quickly realized he hated using paper—so much so he created his own makeshift EHR and practice management system. As EHRs matured, Dr. Muir carefully and eagerly watched the market, noting all of the manual, arduous, and inefficient processes he watched his practice perform. He saw his nurses staying until 7 PM every night trying to complete the day's work. He saw staff toiling through forms requested by patients. He saw the time it took to find and re-file patients' charts, the long notes providers were required to write, and the nurses wading through them to find what they needed. Finally, in 2003, he selected the system he was convinced could meet his needs—NextGen EHR software.

Less Concerned About Cost

Though cost is always a concern for a small practice, Dr. Muir wasn't worried about this investment. "I knew what I could do with this system. Believe it or not, for a small practice, you have to ignore the cost of the system, per se. What you need to consider is the 'time for your cash flow to break even.' You have to do the math and you'll see it works. Within the year, our cash flow broke even by eliminating transcription costs and 1.5 FTE positions. We also eliminated the delay in transcription turnaround, sign-offs, and chart handling. We were coding at least half a level higher, on average, due to improved documentation—as confirmed by automatic code validation. On top of that, you get all of the benefits of an electronic chart, such as drug interaction checks, and your gains are tremendous." Dr. Muir likened his NextGen solution purchase to that of a home. "It's a cliché, but you get what you pay for. You can buy a mobile home with few features, a tract home from a developer that offers little customization, or a custom home with many features that meet your needs exactly."

Muir purchased his NextGen system through GBS Computer Solutions of Youngstown, Ohio—a third-party service company specializing in medical offices that works closely with NextGen Healthcare. "GBS has been great," says Muir. "Though I've got a handle on much of the technical side, and I use NextGen Healthcare's technical support, GBS has been my backup 'IT department.' What you pay to a third-party reseller is more than made up in their expertise and advice."

"Moving forward with this technology has been great for the practice. We really feel we're able to provide the best care and run a good business, which is essential for a small practice."

Peter Muir, MD



Case Study >>>

Fast Start, Fast Results

The office started with NextGen's Knowledge Base Model by adding allergies and medications for every office visit. Dr. Muir then fine-tuned the templates to suit the office workflow. He didn't find the template editor overwhelming at all, as some fear. "If you can do Windows®, you can do templates. You really don't have to be a programmer. If you're apprehensive, start off modestly. Just modify picklists in your commonly used templates. As you learn and gain confidence, you can move to other features in the test environment."

Dr. Muir found that everything he wanted to do with the templates to suit his tastes could be completed with the template editor. "I think anything a small practice may need or want can be accomplished there," he states. Dr. Muir then went to work on the document manager with NextGen EHR software that allows multiple types of customized documents to be created and/or printed with a single button. Dr. Muir modified the Notes document by placing certain items in order and by adjusting the fonts to indicate orders, labs, insurance, etc, allowing nurses or other users to quickly locate pertinent information, making their jobs easier and more productive.

"It sounds small," Muir says, "but it makes a huge difference. You should look at all your processes and ask yourself why you do them that way. Can you do it better, or faster? Probably. If you improve it, it really pays back, especially when you realize how many times you perform that task. The system helps you do this."

Dr. Muir also recommends using NextGen's RTF File Monitor with NextGen EHR software. Though many practices are not aware of the product or its benefits, Dr. Muir is a strong proponent. "RTF Monitor is a huge help. Most practices use it to import transcribed files as they transition to template documentation, but we used it to import several years' worth of information. We had kept all our transcription files for the past several years, as I expected to go to an EHR. Then, I was able to import them instead of scanning or keeping all those old paper charts. It was cheaper, faster, saved server space, and I didn't have any scribbled handwriting as with imaged documents."



A Changed Practice

Change is sometimes gradual, going unnoticed until it really hits you. At Dr. Muir's practice, this was a common occurrence. Dr. Muir knew he had come a long way when, a few months after implementation, he sat in front of the NextGen EHR system and realized he was not aware of the date, no longer writing it on every note. Then he realized he no longer signed off charts, or dictations, or wrote prescriptions in three different places. Change was good.

And during a recent hardware upgrade, the nurses, originally anxious about going to NextGen EHR software, were forced to go back to their paper routine for a day. It was then they were reminded how far they had all come. When the system went back online, they literally applauded. Of course, no longer do they stay until 7 PM every night.

"I knew we'd have a lot of benefits that we'd never have with paper, but it was hard to imagine the extent. It's just a huge advantage. Having instant chart access from anywhere, for instance, or medication ordering with allergy and interaction monitoring—you don't realize how great it is until you're using it."

"For another example, with paper charts it was impossible to monitor patient compliance with screening guidelines within our practice. Not long ago, we had a phone call from Medicare asking how I achieved such a high compliance with their mammogram guidelines. We told them it was because of the NextGen solution."

Moving Ahead

The office implemented NextGen EPM (an enterprise practice management system) and a CPU-CPU lab interface in early 2006, and Dr. Muir is confident it will accelerate the benefits he is already seeing with NextGen EHR software.

"Moving forward with this technology has been great for the practice," says Muir. "We really feel we're able to provide the best care and run a good business, which is essential for a small practice. It's even been great for recruitment. We're bringing in a new physician, and we're finding that recent graduates definitely want to be electronic."

Dr. Muir also credits his relationship with NextGen Healthcare for his success with the NextGen EHR system. "The implementation and support staff is very approachable. Early on I made some suggestions for the product and they were all included in program updates within 3-6 months. That speed of evolution is fantastic. Kudos to the programmers at NextGen Healthcare and the development of the product. I just can't speak highly enough about the product."

Dr. Muir has some final advice for small practices considering an EHR: "The support staff at NextGen Healthcare has been fantastic, and the return time has been great. But to make it easy on yourself, you may want to arrange for a part-time IT consultant, so you can grow and add the latest items you'll want. Because once you see the effects of some of these, you will want more."

NextGen Healthcare Information System, Inc.

795 Horsham Road, Horsham, PA 19044

p: 215.657.7010 | f: 215.657.7011 | sales@nextgen.com | nextgen.com

For full information about the features and functions of NextGen Healthcare's products and services, please contact us at www.nextgen.com/contact.

© 2009 NextGen Healthcare Information Systems, Inc. All rights reserved. NextGen is a registered trademark and a service mark of NextGen Healthcare Information Systems, Inc. All other marks are the property of their respective owners.

♻️ NextGen strives to be a responsible steward of the environment. This paper is recycled and certified by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), which promotes the responsible management of the world's forests.

NEXTGEN
HEALTHCARE INFORMATION SYSTEMS