

Case Study >>>

Busy Florida orthopaedic practice says NextGen EHR value is “very clear”

Looking to improve patient care and internal workflow processes, South Florida Orthopaedics and Sports Medicine decided to “go electronic.” The practice implemented NextGen Healthcare’s electronic health record (EHR) software in 2006. As a result, it has reaped significant benefits by providing clinical staff with immediate access to patient information, and minimizing paper-based processes, such as routing orders for physical therapy and imaging studies.

Automating practice operations has been a priority for the group since 2004, when it implemented NextGen Healthcare’s enterprise practice management (EPM) system. Soon after, says Practice Administrator Sandra T. Richard, “the value of adding NextGen EHR became very clear.” Because South Florida Orthopaedics and Sports Medicine offers comprehensive services—from evaluation to diagnostics to physical therapy to surgery—various providers often need simultaneous access to the health record. “NextGen EHR software allows multiple members of our clinical staff to refer to the chart without having to hunt it down on someone’s desk,” Richard says. This availability puts important information in the providers’ hands at the point of care to improve efficiency and quality.



Overview

PRACTICE

South Florida Orthopaedics and Sports Medicine

Stuart, Florida

www.southflaortho.com/

BUSINESS PROBLEM

South Florida Orthopaedics and Sports Medicine wanted to ensure providers had immediate access to patient data and to enable multiple providers to simultaneously view records.

BUSINESS SOLUTION

The practice implemented NextGen® EPM in 2004 and NextGen EHR in 2006, making information available at the point of care, as well as streamlining internal workflow processes.

PRODUCT DISTINCTIONS

- Orthopaedic-specific content
- Tasking and workflow functionality
- Integration with practice management system
- Reporting capabilities

BENEFITS

- Access data across the continuum of care
- Increased efficiency and productivity of all clinical staff
- Participation in electronic prescribing
- Saving \$8,000 in monthly transcription costs

NEXTGEN®
Electronic Health
Records

Evaluation and internal support are vital to successful implementation

It was a natural progression for South Florida Orthopaedics and Sports Medicine to adopt NextGen EHR once it had experienced success with NextGen EPM. But to verify that the practice was making the right choice, leadership did due diligence by evaluating other systems, soliciting assessments from current NextGen users, and reviewing product demos. The extensive functionality and seamless integration between NextGen EHR and NextGen EPM gave South Florida Orthopaedics and Sports Medicine the confidence that—with this solution—it could achieve its automation goals.

Richard was hired as practice administrator at this stage and charged with managing the planning, training, and implementation processes. “Previously, I implemented an electronic health record in a cardiology practice,” she says, “which was a plus when it came to overseeing the transition here.”



Her first step was to conduct a thorough assessment of internal processes. “It is important to evaluate opportunities where you can improve workflow when transitioning to an EHR solution,” she says. Ultimately, South Florida Orthopaedics and Sports Medicine saw that it could greatly improve patient flow throughout the practice and resolve bottlenecks when patients were sent to the facility’s imaging suites.

Simultaneously, Richard identified six key staff members who could serve as an implementation team. “We wanted to make sure we had the proper IT support and that we were considering clinical staff needs as well,” she notes. The core team was chosen based on individuals’ interest in promoting automation within the practice and their commitment to making sure the project succeeded. “It is important to have internal supporters who grasp how the EHR will change communications and workflow,” she adds.

The team faced three major decisions: how to handle extraction of historical data from paper charts, how to conduct training, and how to facilitate the actual rollout.

Converting paper charts to electronic records

“We decided that we would convert only those paper charts for patients who already had an appointment scheduled and abstracted add-on patients as they visited the practice,” Richard says. Staff entered information a month in advance for patients already on the schedule. When visits were scheduled in the short-term, intake staff collected necessary information by phone prior to the encounter or as the patient arrived for the appointment.

Providers developed a master list of pertinent medical information they wanted abstracted into the EHR system, including past medical history, surgeries, medications, and diagnostic or clinical studies. “When providers saw the patient for the first time after go-live, they had the paper chart with them so they could cross reference and make sure all the information they needed was properly converted,” Richard says.

Traditionally, paper charts were stored in the South Florida Orthopaedics and Sports Medicine building for two years and then transferred to an off-site facility. "Since transitioning to the NextGen solution, I already have two big 'holes' of space in my medical records room," laughs Richard. She says the practice plans to use the free square footage to better manage durable medical equipment (DME) storage and retrieval.

Training super users, staff

Training on NextGen EHR was accomplished in three stages. First, IT staff members traveled to the NextGen Healthcare facility to receive comprehensive information on the software and implementation planning. Second, NextGen Implementation Specialists staff spent several days at South Florida Orthopaedics and Sports Medicine to train super users, including two medical assistants, one physician champion, and two IT staffers. Finally, this initial set of individuals delivered training to an expanded circle of super users who serve as resources throughout the practice.

Reduced patient load during go-live

The South Florida Orthopaedics and Sports Medicine implementation plan involved starting its 16 providers on NextGen EHR two-by-two so that internal resources would be available to assist. Those going live cut back their schedules by 25-50 percent during the first few days, gradually adding appointments as their comfort with NextGen EHR grew. Change is always challenging, Richard says, "but the process became smoother and smoother as we went along."

This approach proved to be invaluable, she notes. "We used a very strategic approach in staging our implementation in coordination with appropriate patient loads during the first week or two, which minimized any frustration our physicians may have experienced. This allowed us to manage the process better."

She added that the reduced load allowed providers to feel their way through the system without detracting from on-one-on time with the patient. Within five months, the entire

clinical staff was utilizing NextGen EHR fully. "The NextGen specialty-specific Knowledgebase Module (KBM) could be customized to our needs and supports a variety of orthopedic conditions," she comments.

Access to information, efficiency, savings top list of benefits

The practice is experiencing numerous benefits as a result of using the NextGen suite of products, Richard says. "Providers appreciate that relevant patient information is at their fingertips so they know they are up-to-speed during office visits or when needed at the hospital—and that they no longer have to hunt down paper." The staff is grateful for the system's tasking functionality, which has helped to improve communication and productivity to ensure that no action items are left undone.

The bottom line at South Florida Orthopaedics and Sports Medicine benefits as well. Transcription costs dropped \$8,000 a month and, over time, the medical record staff was reduced by two FTEs. Additional employees were redeployed to manage the practice's fax server, for instance, or to support other electronic processes.

Each provider utilizes NextGen EHR in a manner that suits his or her style, according to Richard. Some review the chart outside the exam room and update it after the encounter. Others work directly on the computer during the appointment. "We have conducted patient surveys and have heard nothing negative about having a computer in the room—patient satisfaction is high," she notes. "[Patients] do not feel the computer interferes with their care and they continue to be the focus of their provider's attention."

In short, Richard says implementing NextGen EHR has created a win/win/win situation: Clinical staff is pleased with opportunities to improve communication and efficiency. Practice leadership values the information that is readily available. And patients are confident that they are receiving the attention and level of care that they deserve.

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Sandra T. Richard, Practice Administrator

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