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With a Vision for Growth, Tri-County Eye Physicians & Surgeons Leverages NextGen EHR

Paper charts had a lengthy run at Tri-County Eye Physicians & Surgeons. After all, the eastern Pennsylvania ophthalmology center of excellence amassed more than 50,000 active patient records housed onsite during its 35 years in business. But the limitations of a paper-based medical record—not to mention the added costs and inefficiencies of maintaining, filing, re-filing, losing, and finding documents—became apparent as Tri-County Eye Physicians & Surgeons expanded to a second facility.

Having followed advances towards electronic health records for years, Dr. Richard B. Prince and his colleagues at Tri-County Eye Physicians & Surgeons realized in 2007 that the time was right to convert from the traditional paper medical record to electronic health record.

With an established base of ophthalmology and optometry customers, as well as powerful and user-friendly software, NextGen Healthcare Information Systems, Inc. quickly topped Tri-County Eye Physician & Surgeon's A-list of vendors during its period of due diligence. Now the practice wonders how it ever managed with its old paper-based system.



Overview

PRACTICE

Tri-County Eye Physicians & Surgeons
Southampton & New Britain, PA

PRACTICE PROFILE

Tri-County Eye Physicians & Surgeons provides comprehensive and sub-specialty ophthalmology services, routine eye exams, diagnosis and treatment of eye disease, advanced cataract surgery, laser vision correction (LASIK), oculoplastic surgery, and pediatric ophthalmology.

BUSINESS PROBLEM

When it opened a second location, reliance upon paper-based charts was no longer feasible for Tri-County Eye Physicians & Surgeons. Information needed at one site may be stored in the other. In addition, staff members were spending too much time locating, pulling, and refiling medical records.

BUSINESS SOLUTION

Just 12 months after implementation of NextGen EPM software, Tri-County Eye Physicians & Surgeons adopted NextGen EHR, which enables providers to access patient information no matter where they see patients. Ophthalmology-specific content enhances documentation, improving quality, productivity, and charge capture.

PRODUCT DISTINCTIONS

- Ophthalmology-specific content
- Interfaces with diagnostic equipment
- Reliable, stable vendor
- Commitment to ongoing updates and to supporting regulatory compliance Coding assistant

BENEFITS

- Eliminated all transcription costs, saving an estimated \$100,000 per year
- Access to patient record from multiple sites
- Diagnostic tests and imaging studies flow into patient record
- Meets emerging federal requirements associated with quality reporting and e-prescribing
- Improved coding, charge capture for enhanced revenue—generating 120% more than previous levels
- Future opportunities for community-wide data exchange

NEXTGEN
HEALTHCARE INFORMATION SYSTEMS

Established in 1973, Tri-County Eye Physicians & Surgeons is a comprehensive ophthalmology group practice with eight board-certified ophthalmologists, three optometrists, two full-service locations, a Medicare-certified ambulatory surgery center (ASC), and a staff of more than 100 allied health professionals including opticians, certified ophthalmic assistants, and support staff. Like practices of similar size and scope, Tri-County Eye Physicians & Surgeons ultimately grew tired of the paper chase.

Before transitioning to the electronic health record, a file clerk would pull a patient chart—including a superbill—several days prior to a patient encounter. The clerk would then make sure the chart was in the exam room at the time of the appointment. The chart would be re-filed after the visit—but then pulled and re-filed a second time to accommodate insertion of a copy of the physician’s dictated letter. Plus, as ancillary studies were completed, the chart would be pulled yet again, placed on the physician’s desk, analyzed, and re-filed. Staff was simply spending too much time searching for, pulling, and re-filing charts—perhaps several times for a single patient.

Things became especially complicated when Tri-County Eye Physicians & Surgeons added another facility and an ASC. If a physician were to see a patient at the remote facility, the patient chart needed to be sent ahead of time at an additional expense.

Combined with the fact that its paper medical records took up valuable space that could be converted for administrative use or even exam rooms, the practice’s managing partners saw the writing on the wall—a conversion to the electronic health record system would allow for continued growth without adding more expense.

“After wasting so much time, resources, and energy on paper charts for so long, it just made sense for us to move to an EHR system,” says Richard B. Prince, MD. “We felt than an EHR could position us for growth without increasing

“Its interfaces were among the initial attractions of NextGen EHR. We have since connected all of our equipment, including autorefractors, lensometers, visual field devices, fundus cameras, and optic nerve imaging machines, allowing them to interface data directly into the EHR record.”

Richard B. Prince, MD

overhead. In addition, we knew it would help us become more compliant with ever-increasing reporting requirements as set forth by the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS).”

Tri-County Eye Physicians & Surgeons Advances with Technology Partner, NextGen Healthcare

In summer of 2007, the decision had been made to implement an EHR. It wasn’t long before Tri-County Eye Physicians & Surgeons completed its due diligence in evaluating a handful of EHR systems, conducting site visits to see the technologies in action.

While some Tri-County Eye physicians were leaning toward an EHR system from vendors that produced only ophthalmology software, Dr. Prince wasn’t so sure that was the answer for their robust and growing practice. “With all the consolidation in the industry, I was concerned whether a niche vendor would be around in the long term,” he says. “Additionally, the industry is getting very complicated with

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compliance, coding, quality reporting, and electronic prescribing requirements. I doubted that a small software vendor would be able to keep up with all the changes.”

Dr. Prince’s reasoning made sense to his colleagues, and the group selected NextGen as its technology partner for both its enterprise practice management (EPM) and EHR systems. “NextGen has ophthalmology-specific content, very robust software and a widely installed base across many specialties, including ophthalmology,” he says. “I knew NextGen Health-care would never stop working for us with regular updates and ongoing support.”

Tri-County Eye Physicians & Surgeons began installation of NextGen EPM in January 2008 and went live on that portion of the software system in April. After a few months, the practice began rollout of NextGen EHR in the latter half of 2008, with a “go-live” target date of Jan. 1, 2009.

Rather than phase in the EHR over time, Tri-County Eye Physicians & Surgeons took an all-or-nothing approach, fully immersing physicians in the EHR on the go-live date in January 2009. To ease the transition, however, physicians

scaled back to 50% patient capacity for the first month and 75% for the subsequent two weeks. Within only six weeks, they were at 100%.

And while there was some pushback from some staff, it wasn’t long before everyone was on board with the technology with nary a thought of their old paper records system. “Some technicians fought us tooth and nail, but within a few weeks they not only came around, they became our best EHR champions,” Dr. Prince recalls. “They realized it’s better for them, the physicians, and, most importantly, the patients.”

NextGen’s Practice-Specific Functionality Translates into a Win-Win

Tri-County Eye Physicians & Surgeons began reaping the benefits of NextGen EHR almost immediately. “Among the initial attractions for us were the interfaces that NextGen has created for the EHR,” Dr. Prince says. “We have connected just about all our equipment, including autorefractors, lensometers, visual field devices, fundus cameras, and optic nerve imaging machines, allowing them to exchange data directly with NextGen EHR.”



The organization has also realized some very significant coding benefits. “We are better able to capture all charges and then code at the appropriate levels,” according to Dr. Prince. NextGen software’s automated coding assistant checks documentation against current procedural codes. “In many cases we learned that we were undercoding or failing to record procedures altogether.”

For example, when a patient complains of “flashers” or “floaters,” it could mean simple aging of the eye or the onset of a more serious condition. Either way, the physician performs a thorough retinal exam, which usually includes extended ophthalmoscopy (EO). Although an EO is a separate billable procedure beyond the normal exam, many times the procedure was left off the paper chart or the claim.

“This does not happen in the NextGen system because of the charge capture feature,” according to Dr. Prince. “When I open the EHR to make a drawing of the peripheral retina—a requirement for reporting an EO—it automatically initiates the charge coupling.”

Looking Back on Some Impressive Results

Fully operational on the EHR for less than a year, Tri-County Eye Physicians & Surgeons can already point to tangible results. For one, it has eliminated all transcription costs since data is input by caregivers directly into the EHR—a savings of about \$100,000 annually. Overall, Tri-County Eye Physicians & Surgeons estimates its revenue per patient encounter is 120% greater as a direct result of the NextGen EHR functionality. Coding levels more accurately reflect the

Overall, Tri-County Eye Physicians & Surgeons estimates its revenue per patient encounter is 120% greater as a direct result of the effective and efficient implementation of NextGen® EHR.

services delivered and virtually no charges remain uncaptured. In addition, providers have increased productivity and patient satisfaction is higher, which leads to more referrals.

Dr. Prince gives much of the credit for these positive results to a strong relationship between Tri-County Eye Physicians & Surgeons and NextGen Healthcare, as well as the practice’s success in getting the right EHR Implementation Team identified and in place early. “The EHR is a group effort,” he says, and that he can’t overstate the importance of building a collegial partnership to maximize results.

Tri-County Eye Physicians & Surgeons sees a day when its EHR is more than just an internal tool, becoming a true link in the connected healthcare chain. “Now that we have NextGen software, I suspect we’ll have the potential to exchange data in the future with other healthcare providers in the community,” Dr. Prince says. “When a patient from the local hospital checks in with us, we should be able to exchange the data. That will make it much easier for us and much safer for the patient.”

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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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