

# Vision Care of Maine Says Goodbye and Then Returns to NextGen Healthcare

## THE CHALLENGE

### The transition to a digital platform

Vision Care of Maine's journey with NextGen Healthcare began almost twenty years ago when they implemented NextGen Enterprise PM as their practice management software. At the time, they continued to document clinical encounters on paper.

"The practice management (PM) software from the get-go was fantastic," says Cristy Hewitt, RN, director of operations at Vision Care of Maine.

"Our business is complex. We have a couple of different tax IDs and multiple national provider identifiers (NPIs). The PM software enables us to report at multiple levels, according to different departments, treatment modalities, and locations. The scheduling templates have always worked well for us."

Because of Meaningful Use incentives, Vision Care of Maine eventually transitioned from paper documentation to an electronic health record. Because providers and staff were familiar with NextGen Enterprise PM, the practice implemented NextGen Enterprise EHR.

### Issues arise with clinical documentation

Over time, concerns emerged about the efficiency of the templates used for ophthalmology documentation. Practice administrators did not know who to reach out to at NextGen Healthcare to discuss these concerns. Physicians expressed dissatisfaction with the time it took to document care. Retina specialists became the driving force to consider other EHRs.

"Providers told me that the EHR is the limiting factor for increasing their patient volume. They said they could see an additional 20 patients per day if the EHR was more efficient," said Hewitt.

While the staff at the practice remained happy with NextGen Enterprise PM, they decided to consider an alternative platform. They turned to a comprehensive, cloud-based solution to replace NextGen Enterprise EHR and PM.

"We never had any issues with the PM software. We knew if we went elsewhere, we were going to be sacrificing the PM platform for a subpar system," said Hewitt.

## CLIENT PROFILE

### Vision Care of Maine

**Type of practice:** Multidisciplinary eye care clinic

**Location:** Maine, headquartered in Bangor with locations throughout the state; offering services to approximately three-quarters of the state of Maine

**Facilities:** Ten clinics, two ambulatory surgery centers (ASCs), four optical shops

**Number of providers:** Six ophthalmologists, four optometrists

**Background:** Provides complete eye care services—comprehensive eye examination; optical care, contacts, advanced cataract surgery, LASIK, and treatment for chronic eye diseases, including macular degeneration, glaucoma, and diabetic eye disease

### NEXTGEN HEALTHCARE SOLUTIONS

- NextGen® Enterprise EHR
- NextGen® Enterprise PM
- NextGen® RCM Services
- NextGen® Managed Cloud Services

## RESULTS

*Since Vision Care of Maine renewed their working relationship with NextGen RCM services...*

↓56% **Decrease** in total days in A/R

↑66% **Increase** in average payment per settled encounter

↑29% **Increase** in average collection rate per encounter

↓75% **Decrease** in initial charge lag

↓69% **Decrease** in total charge lag

↓29% **Decrease** in days to bill

## The grass is not always greener on the other side

Vision Care of Maine changed vendors in January 2021. However, the practice quickly discovered the new vendor's PM software lacked much of what the practice needed.

"The new PM software was definitely not as complex as NextGen Enterprise. The software could not accommodate billing for an ambulatory surgery center (ASC). We held three months' worth of charges on the books because our staff couldn't get them out the door.

"The reporting was horrible on the PM side. It was impossible to pull reports per location," said Hewitt.

Multiple billing issues resulted in either missed deadlines for timely filing or outright denials. Problems with the new platform meant delivery of care became more time consuming. The practice had to decrease its volume of patients on a day-to-day basis. The financial losses began to add up.

## Patient safety is threatened

The new platform was not stable. "The software kept going down—I'm talking three times a day. In addition, buttons didn't work. For example, when you hit the Import Medical History button, it imported the wrong patient history.

"Some major patient safety issues arose because of how poorly the EHR was functioning. It got to the point that my providers said, 'We can't use this system anymore and continue to provide safe patient care,'" said Hewitt.

When confronted with safety issues, their new vendor said it would take three months or more to fix them. According to their contract, it should have taken no more than 30 days. Thankfully, as the Vision Care of Maine navigated these new challenges, they could still use NextGen® software as a buffer when necessary. The practice could keep NextGen Enterprise operating on an as-needed basis because they hosted the software on their own servers.

"I maintained my NextGen Healthcare license because I wanted continued access to everything. In the back of my mind, I thought maybe we'd go back at some point."

**Cristy Hewitt, RN**  
Director of Operations  
Vision Care of Maine

## HIGHLIGHTS

- **Concerns emerged about efficiency** of the templates used for documentation in NextGen Enterprise EHR
- **The practice changed vendors** in January 2021
- **Problems with the new vendor's EHR and PM** system quickly emerged. For example:
  - Inability to pull reports per location
  - Inability to accommodate billing for an ASC
  - Platform generally unstable—crashed frequently
  - A slowdown in care delivery and billing errors led to financial losses
- **Patient safety issues arose** because of the platform's poor functionality
- **Vision Care of Maine returned to NextGen Healthcare** in April 2021

## THE SOLUTION

### The road back

“I maintained my NextGen Healthcare license because I wanted continued access to everything. In the back of my mind, I thought maybe we’d go back at some point.

“Because I didn’t shut everything down, it made it very simple for us to go back—which is what ended up happening,” said Hewitt.

Vision Care of Maine terminated their contract with the new vendor after just a few months. Hewitt estimates that considering the outright cost for the new system and financial losses resulting from inability to bill for services, the episode cost the practice close to half a million dollars.

In April 2021, the practice returned to the same NextGen software they had been using. Nothing had changed. Staff members opened the chart and went right back at it.

“I can tell you NextGen Healthcare has been nothing if not super since I called them and told them we wanted to come back,” adds Hewitt.

## THE RESULTS

### A new perspective on documentation

“Our technicians serve as scribes,” explains Hewitt. “Our doctors do not enter information in the charts, ever. When we returned to NextGen Healthcare, our technicians were ecstatic. They knew exactly what they were doing,” said Hewitt.

At Vision Care of Maine, after the doctor finishes the patient visit and leaves, technicians stay behind with the patient for several minutes to finish up the chart—entering information on diagnoses, follow-up care, charges, and so forth into the EHR.

Previously, doctors had expressed concerns about the amount of time technicians spent documenting care in the EHR after the visit. They wanted to see the next patient in the exam room as quickly as possible. After the experience with switching EHRs and the return to NextGen Enterprise, attitudes changed.

“The physicians have stopped focusing as much on the time technicians spend documenting care. They’re happy that the information they need is presented in a concise manner, so they can see the patient safely and efficiently,” said Hewitt.

### The ability to share data and customize templates

Because Vision Care of Maine is a multidisciplinary eye care practice, they need a single system with templates for each area of specialization. They need to share information across disciplines, so providers can collaborate and cover for each other when necessary. That’s what Hewitt says they have with NextGen Healthcare.

“I need to have cataract, glaucoma, retina, and optometry all within the same EHR. I can’t have different EHRs for different specialties and our ASC. Providers love the fact that they can access customized ASC templates, which I built within NextGen Enterprise, within the same program they use to access their other templates,” said Hewitt.

“It was amazing how pleased providers were when we switched to the NextGen Managed Cloud Services for hosting. They’re like, ‘Oh my God, it’s so quick.’ Well, yeah, it is.”

**Cristy Hewitt, RN**  
Director of Operations  
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The ability to customize templates is also important to the practice. For example, when retina specialists open the EHR, they want to see very specific data related to ocular health. The timeframe for treatment is short. They want information displayed in chronological order and don't want to wade through data about vision test results and other details. Vision Care of Maine uses a customized template that gathers information from other templates and displays it in a manner that meets the needs of retina providers.

## Move to a cloud-hosted environment

Recently, Vision Care of Maine transitioned to NextGen Managed Cloud Services. This allows the practice to use the EHR and PM through a web-based service instead of accessing software through a server at one of their own facilities. NextGen Healthcare offers cloud hosting in collaboration with Amazon Web Services.

Hewitt explains the difference: "Suppose a server is housed in one practice facility and another facility 200 miles away has to connect to it. That means the signal must travel via the internet through rural Maine to reach the server, and then the signal has to bounce back. The speed of the EHR is going to be very slow.

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## Revenue cycle management

Before the switch, Vision Care of Maine used NextGen Revenue Cycle Management (RCM) Services. When they returned to NextGen, Hewitt was happy to resume their relationship. NextGen RCM Services helped the practice get revenue management processes back on track.

"RCM has been super. I cannot say enough good things about them. They've gone above and beyond in helping us with claim adjustments and working some old stuff for us. They've done a lot to help us clean up our old accounts receivable (A/R). They hit the floor running." said Hewitt.

Since Vision Care of Maine renewed their working relationship with NextGen RCM services, they have achieved the following results:

- **56% decrease in total days in A/R**
- **66% increase in average payment** per settled encounter
- **29% increase in average collection rate** per encounter – the amount collected for settled encounters compared to the amount billed
- **75% decrease in initial charge lag** – the time between the patient visit and when the first charge for the encounter is entered in NextGen Enterprise PM
- **69% decrease in total charge lag** – the time it takes from the date of the patient visit to process all charges for an encounter
- **29% decrease in days to bill** – the number of days from the encounter date until creation of the initial third-party claim

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## Looking ahead

Hewitt looks forward to expanding the practice's potential by making better use of NextGen Enterprise, including upgrading to the newest releases of the EHR and PM software. The practice aims to put new features to use, including e-prescribing narcotic medications and new services, such as NextGen® Mobile. Hewitt thinks NextGen Mobile will be a huge benefit for on-call doctors who may need to access patient records any hour of the day or night.

"All this stuff that we didn't know about or didn't ask about before is possible with NextGen Healthcare now. As a practice, we are going to be proactive and stay current," said Hewitt.

Equally important is the renewal of the practice's relationship with NextGen Healthcare.

"I think the mindset of our providers has changed. The workflow hasn't really changed, but they were surprised at the disastrous results of our attempt to switch to a different EHR. They took for granted many of the features that NextGen Healthcare built into their system. Now that they've seen all EHRs don't offer these features, they're like, 'Okay, we're good.'

"I'm excited to be back with NextGen Healthcare," said Hewitt.

"We're not ever switching again," she adds. "I've told my colleagues, if they ever talk about leaving NextGen Healthcare again, they can find another director of operations because I'm not doing it again."

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**Cristy Hewitt, RN**  
Director of Operations  
Vision Care of Maine



## HOW CAN WE HELP?

Partner with us at **855-510-6398** or **results@nextgen.com**