Large specialty practice turns to Medfusion to keep patients happy and help staff work more efficiently

As the largest orthopedics practice in Austin, Texas Orthopedics wanted to look the part, set an example for patient service, leverage its EMR and capture operational efficiencies. With Medfusion, the practice created a state-of-the-art Web design and added online pre-registration, appointment request and bill payment services. The valuable features have enhanced patient satisfaction and front-office productivity while positioning the organization for growth.

It’s a common problem for orthopedic practices: Patients suffer an injury and automatically call the office for an appointment. What they don’t realize is that, until specific I’s are dotted and T’s are crossed from an insurance standpoint, the provider may not be able to see them as quickly as they would like. Medical insurance companies want to ascertain, before they cover services rendered, that the claim can not be categorized as an OPL – other party liability. If the problem is work-related, costs should be reimbursed by Worker’s Compensation, for instance. Likewise, injuries sustained during a motor vehicle accident may be covered by the automobile insurer.

“When people injure themselves, they don’t necessarily think of fault, or if they should be filing this or that,” says Jennifer Kinman, COO at Austin-based Texas Orthopedics. “They just know they need to be seen because they’re hurting.”

And this can cause problems at the front desk. Patients don’t want to wait or be rescheduled for any reason.

“Ten percent of our patients present to the front desk with an injury that occurred on their job site. Sometimes they haven’t submitted anything to their employer and often those patients didn’t even realize that they were supposed to report their injury,”
explains Kinman. “This results in our front desk educating the patient about the requirements and making some phone calls because worker’s comp applies. In some cases, this delays the appointment or requires rescheduling. That, in turn, leads to very unhappy patients.”

To better serve patients and reduce stress at the front desk, Texas Orthopedics began to look for strategies to head off these situations, according to Kinman. The solution: take full advantage of its website.

By the fall of 2006, Texas Orthopedics began to research ways to use its website more effectively. Kinman, chief operating officer, and a physician team worked together to select a service provider. One evaluation criterion was related to the group’s electronic medical record system (EMR), which had been in-place nearly five years by this time. “We wanted a technology that could integrate with our EMR. We could then encourage patients to complete forms online so we could incorporate the information into the chart electronically,” says Kinman.

After a two-month search, Texas Orthopedics chose Medfusion. In addition to working with the existing practice management and EMR systems — Medfusion already had an established relationship with the vendor — the practice was impressed with Medfusion’s design flexibility and content management features.

Through its website, Texas Orthopedics now offers pre-registration and health forms submission, appointment requests, bill payment and medical reference content for patient education.

50% of patients fill out paperwork on line

The new site has had an impact. For patients who pre-register online, the staff has time to review patients’ forms and verify eligibility before they arrive. “About 50% of our patients are now filling out paperwork in advance online,” says Kinman. “The questionnaire helps us screen for primary coverage. We’re heading off more problems before they happen, and that always makes for a more pleasant front desk experience.” Having completed the paperwork beforehand also reduces wait times for patients.

Web-based appointment requests are also gaining popularity. And the practice’s management of the requests is improved. “Especially on Monday morning, when all the weekend warriors would be calling, it’s especially helpful,” says Kinman. “Everyone who needs to see the appointment requests can see them as they come in. In addition to the appointments manager, the administrator and I both see them. We can tell by the flow of requests when we’re getting busy.”

According to Kinman, Texas Orthopedics is starting to get patients in the habit of paying bills online as well. All of the Medfusion features have contributed to staff productivity by re-directing customer interaction from the phone to the Internet. Texas Orthopedics does not have precise metrics because the practice has added doctors and locations recently, making baseline calculations difficult. But Kinman reports that call volumes have indeed been reduced.

“When two physicians joined the practice last year, we didn’t have to hire additional scheduling or administrative staff,” recalls Kinman. “Without Medfusion as an alternative method for appointment requests, we probably would have had to bring in more resources.”

Practice updates content with a click of a mouse

For the website itself, Texas Orthopedics and Medfusion collaborated to create a winning look. “Medfusion is very strong on design,” says Kinman. “We believe our site stands out. We really made an effort to make it less generic and more distinctive.”

“We really like maintaining our own content with Medfusion,” she adds. “It’s been tremendous to change pages and text with just a few clicks of the mouse.” Kinman and an IT help desk staff member typically keep the website current and promote events like the practice’s monthly arthritis seminars.

As an added service to its customers, Texas Orthopedics offers a patient education section on the new site. Visitors can “click where it hurts” on a body diagram to access information from the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons about possible injuries or conditions. Patients can also access and read articles about arthritis, proper icing techniques, osteoporosis, preparing for surgery and other topics.

Texas Orthopedics anticipates that it will continue to grow and provide expanded services to patients in the area. With Medfusion, the practice is in a strong position to serve the tech-savvy Austin. “We’re the largest orthopedics practice in the area,” says Kinman, “and we like to have the best of the best in terms of technology, facilities and services.”

Jennifer Kinman

‘Home-grown’ sites offered limited functionality

For years, Texas Orthopedics had relied on friends and relatives of staff members, or, more recently, services from a national business listing and generic website focusing on lifestyle issues — to maintain its cyber-presence. “With our homegrown sites, we couldn’t make quick content updates,” recalls Kinman. Because it was a “cookie-cutter,” template-based package, the online service the practice used lacked the functionality for easy customization.

And of course, rudimentary sites were unable to provide the sort of advanced, online self-service features — like online pre-registration — that could improve the patient experience and make the front-desk employees’ lives easier.

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