

**Increased Revenue, Optimized  
Efficiencies, and Reduced Costs:**

**Real Practices Speak on the Value of  
Patient Communications.**

**Medfusion**

Running a physician practice today has many challenges: between declining reimbursements, challenging patient collection processes, and countless regulations dictating what technologies and processes you need to implement – and when – it’s definitely an uphill battle.

Fortunately, there are solutions out there that help you simplify practice workflow and respond to the many challenges: specifically online patient communication solutions, also called “patient portals.”

Patient portal solutions – like Medfusion – move many of the time- and resource-consuming patient interactions from on the phone or in the office to online. Things like filling out registration paperwork, requesting appointments, paying bills, requesting prescription renewals, asking questions of the staff ... all of these and more can be done securely online through Medfusion’s patient portal.

And physicians and their practices are reaping the benefits. Today over 30,000 physicians and more than two million of their patients interact daily with each other securely online using Medfusion solutions. And the demand is growing: nearly 35,000 new patients are creating patient portal accounts each week to be able to interact with their physicians online ... resulting in streamlined office operations, reduced operating costs, and increased patient satisfaction.

Can it really be that simple? Yes it can! In the following white paper four practices discuss their success with implementing a patient portal solution with Medfusion, and the benefits it has provided to their practice. Read on to learn more.

**Customers Interviewed:**

Dr. Chris Blasy, Contemporary Medicine **(CB)**

Mr. John Nosek, Executive Director, Greensboro Orthopaedics **(JN)**

Mr. Richard Bevington, Practice Manager, OB/GYN Specialists of Northern Kentucky **(RB)**

Mr. Mike Newcum, Executive Director, Plano Orthopedics **(MN)**

**Q1: What led you to establish an online patient portal in your practice?**

**JN:** We’ve always been on the leading edge of technology in our practice. We embraced electronic medical records in the 1990s, so as websites became more prolific and more prevalent, we wanted to take part in that with our marketing strategy. We dipped our toes in the water in 2000 with a local vendor. We had a static site in which everything was hard-coded and difficult to change ... it was not interactive with the users at all. We wanted something that was interactive with our patients and that we could manage ourselves and we achieved this with Medfusion.

**RB:** We like to think that our practice is perceived as one that’s on the cutting-edge and moving forward with technology. We already had a nice website, and adding the Medfusion patient portal solutions solidified that perception. A good segment of our patient population is affluent, busy working women. Moving forward in the IT world is certainly something that appeals to them because it’s something they use every day at work and is easy for them to use. So to

implement the Medfusion patient portal solutions in conjunction with our electronic medical records show that we're serious about moving forward with information technology. We are leaders in that arena in the OB/GYN practice.

**MN:** We were experiencing some challenges in communicating with our patients. Patients were having a hard time getting through to our practice on the phone because the volume of incoming calls was so large. Sometimes they would be on hold for several minutes just waiting for our staff to make them an appointment. If they left a message, our staff would attempt to call them back and try to catch them at our convenience which made it very difficult to get the appointment nailed down when they needed to be seen. The tipping point was when even our referring primary care physicians were complaining that they could not get through to us on the phone.

**Q2: Why did you choose a patient portal as an alternative communication platform to address the challenges you were facing?**

**MN:** We are in a very progressive part of the Dallas area with many prominent large corporations and corporate headquarters. The patients that we serve are typically very computer savvy. We conducted a survey in which over 85% of our patient base indicated they had access to the internet and were comfortable with conducting business over the web. We looked at a few online solutions but after speaking with practices that were using Medfusion solutions, it was apparent that these practices were cutting edge, ahead of the power curve and facilitated patient and customer service through the internet...which is what we wanted to achieve.

**CB:** I wanted to incorporate a better method of communication to patients in a secure environment while adding value to the practice. The Medfusion solution had several aspects that were important to my practice in addition to being an AAFP Advantage™ partner. Having the professional buy-in from that organization gave me confidence about the quality of the product and the ability to do the services I needed it to do.

**Q3: How has the response been to your online communication solutions?**

**JN:** We have over 11,000 patients who have registered so far and are using our patient portal features. We also have had over 225,000 hits to our website in the past year. People are searching us out. And I do think the website is going to be the tool of the future. I'm hearing a lot now about practices even dropping their Yellow Page ads because people are looking at websites. It's the new generation. Particularly, we have informed our patients that registration forms are now available online and they can do it at their leisure, at home, at night. We have used the online bill pay feature for over two years and we see lots of people using their credit cards to pay their bill balances which filters directly into our bank account...it's very painless and easy for us. Our office receives over 19,000 telephone calls a month and with patients who lead very busy lives the website gives them a tool to communicate with us when they have five minutes to request an appointment even if it is at 11:00 in the evening. It saves them time and it saves us time because we can address their concerns without having to disrupt the workday with phone tag. It's becoming the preferred mechanism of communication.

**MN:** Patients are thrilled that they are able to go online at their convenience and request their appointments. In this high-tech world, our patients are looking to what they can do on the internet to save them time. Our patients lead very busy lives and are thinking, “I want to do it at 11pm when I actually have a few minutes to sit down, not during the workday.”

**CB:** Our patients are enabled to be proactive when managing their healthcare by retrieving valuable patient education from the website. Our website serves as the launch pad for patients to initiate all online encounters with the practice. They can request appointments at their convenience, submit health-related unstructured questions, complete and submit demographic and health history information, and complete and submit Review of Systems and History of Present Illness from a structured branch logic questionnaire...all securely in an online environment. The patients are able to complete these in a manner that can be done when the patient feels they have time to do it, and they don't have to sit on hold, wait for messages, and return phone calls.

**MN:** When we first implemented our solutions, we wanted to have a seamless transition with our staff and ensure they were comfortable with the new process so we started with the Appointment Request and Pre-Registration applications. The day we went live, there were already ten appointments waiting without starting any marketing...patients were finding it on their own! We had our web designer add a prominent button on the home page of our website for patients to easily click to the portal and submit an appointment request. These solutions have been very well received by our staff because of the amount of time it saves them.

**Q4: What benefits are you seeing from your portal?**

**MN:** The Appointment Request application has significantly decompressed the phone lines. We found that 90% of appointments we are able to fill and answer back initially because of the parameters that were set up. We've been tracking the number of hits we get to our Internet site and we might get 50 or 60 a day. It's gone up to over 350 a day. We found that over the last month we had almost 380 requests for patients that actually registered online and we can see the improvements to our phone lines with a shorter on hold time and fewer incoming calls. With the Pre-Registration application, the patient's process is expedited. Recently when patients have come in for their appointment after submitting paperwork online, the front desk now indicates for the patient to have a seat and the doctor will be right with them. Other patients who have not pre-registered online are filling out the paperwork, waiting longer to be seen and wondering how they can save this time in the future. We have also been able to clear up any administrative issues with patients to receive more accurate, complete, and correct data. We have eliminated a lot of bad data from nuances of gathering information over the phone.

**CB:** We are able to respond to patients' requests at designated times that fit into our day which helps prioritize our workflows. I can answer a question succinctly, quickly and send education to the patient as an attachment that will provide them the knowledge to manage their medical care appropriately. Questions can be answered when I have time in my day and it doesn't interrupt my patient flow or the other aspects of running the business of the practice. Applications like Appointment Requests and Online Bill Pay significantly reduce the time spent on the phone as well as the number of incoming phone calls. Submitted patient demographic information is easy to bring into my EMR and allows for effective and complete documentation

which helps me evaluate the patient's data. Symptom Assessment gives patients the ability to put in their primary reason for their visit. Whether it is one reason or multiple, it will prompt appropriate questions and obtain a complete review of systems and history of present illness associated with the problem the patient is coming in for. This not only allows the patient to answer questions in a less confrontational situation where they have privacy and can be more honest, it also saves them time when they come into the office because all we have to do is get their vitals and evaluate the already documented information with the patient.

**RB:** Appointment Requests has been of principal value. We have one receptionist for nine physicians and at times the call volume was incredible. Now that patients can request an appointment online, the phone volume has significantly decreased. In fact, there's even a lull at times. Once a patient submits an appointment request, our receptionist can respond to it immediately. She's not consumed with being on the phone scheduling an appointment, while other lines are ringing or patients are on hold. Also of value is the Ask a Question solution; it's had an impact on the nurse triage calls. Our nurses are able to address patient questions in order of acuity, and much more quickly online than they could when a patient left them a phone message. And if it's an issue that requires the doctor's attention, the doctor can go online and respond directly to the patient rather than having to convey a message through the nurse.

**Q5: How are you getting the word out to your patients?**

**JN:** We took a very aggressive marketing approach. We wanted to make sure people knew about us and the services we offered. There are several ways that we've made them aware of our website and online services. One is our telephone messaging system: our on-hold message directs patients to our website to request an appointment or to ask us non-emergent questions. In every exam room, every nurse's station and checkout desk, we have framed flyers telling patients about what they can do on the website. We also have little cards that are in every exam room telling them about the website and patient portal. We're finding a lot of people are really embracing communicating online with us as they do in other areas of their lives.

**RB:** Initially, we printed 5 x 8 announcement postcards and mailed them to over 7,500 patients. We also placed them in the office suites. The response wasn't overwhelming. But then one of our employees started copying the postcard and cutting it to size to insert with the 12-month appointment reminder card we mail to our patients. I thought that was a brilliant idea so I had the postcard reprinted to fit in the envelope, and that's when we started to see a significant increase in patient utilization. The results of inserting the postcard with the appointment reminder have been great!

**CB:** We try every opportunity that we have an interaction with a patient to communicate our online services to them. When they first make a call for an initial appointment, the staff reminds them to register online informing them that it saves them time when they arrive to the office by completing their demographic and health history information ahead of time. They also inform patients that once they create an account, they can communicate with their physician staff securely online at their leisure. When they come in for visits our staff reminds them about registering online and indicates if they register on the website, they can quickly and securely receive results of the tests they are having done that day.

**Q6: In what ways has the Medfusion portal impacted your practice and patients?**

- JN:** We have seen changes in our office workflows for the positive. Historically, we used to employ someone part-time who would look at all our new appointments that were made in our appointment system and then package paper registration forms and consent forms and hand address them and mail those out. The nice thing about the web portal is we can get those requests now for appointments or information online and we can send that information back to them through the secure portal. That is terrific because we're saving paper and ink and we're becoming more green in addition to saving costs on labor, print and postage for those forms. One of the values we are seeing is the patient satisfaction survey where patients can respond to us about their experience in our office or their surgical experience. It gives them a way to give us their feedback quickly and privately. A lot of people don't have the time to sit down and write or type a letter, but a quick email via the portal is always appreciated.
- CB:** Medfusion really allows my practice to be able to provide a comprehensive customer service plan, that interfaces with the patient, both while they're in the office and when they're away from the office. It really takes the problems of the phone system out of the equation. Medfusion provides a means of a much more efficient and better transfer of information with my patients.
- RB:** Our patients now have the ability to complete a lengthy medical history form in the convenience of their home rather than sitting in a waiting room with a pencil and clipboard in hand. Completing the forms at home allows them to really think through each question and respond thoroughly, rather than rushing to complete each question in the waiting room. They're more at ease knowing that they've given the doctor all of the information he needs to begin treatment or diagnosis of their problem. When they're done completing the form online, it's right there ready for us to print and have available prior to the patient's appointment. Our patients truly appreciate that we offer this new online technology. Not only because they can complete the forms on their own time, but also because they can show up for the appointment on time rather than 30 minutes early to complete the paperwork. They don't have to wait as long in the waiting room before they see the doctor. It's also easier for them to type than to handwrite everything, and for us that's huge. Sometimes the forms aren't legible when they're handwritten, and now that it's all done online there isn't room for error.
- MN:** We have seen a very positive "Thank you!" in our community for being cutting edge. It seems like the health care industry is always a bit behind on offering technological solutions because they just don't see the value. Practices ask: "Will patients really go online?" "Will they really request appointments?" "Will they really register?" They do! Patients appreciate the convenience of being able to conduct healthcare transactions online just like in every other area of their life. It's validating the whole concept of managing their health and taking communication with their physician practice online.

For more information about Medfusion and how to capitalize on patient portal solutions to increase revenue, optimize efficiencies, and lower costs, log on to <http://www.medfusion.net/pp> or call 877.599.5123.