



OVERCOMING DELAYS, REDUCING PAPER: “MISSION IMPOSSIBLE” BECOMES “MISSION ACCOMPLISHED” WITH GREENWAY’S PRIMEPATIENT SOLUTION

Introduction

Southern Crescent Women’s Healthcare was determined to overcome what had historically been “Mission Impossible” at the busy obstetrics/gynecology practice – cutting wait times in the lobby. A significant contributing factor was the time required for patients to complete the mandatory paperwork prior to their appointments. Southern Crescent Women’s Healthcare recruited its electronic health record (EHR) provider, Greenway Medical Technologies Inc. and its patient Web portal, *PrimePatient*, with its Internet-based patient communication solution to undertake “Operation Easy Access” and solve the problem.

Serving the southeastern metro Atlanta area, Southern Crescent Women’s Healthcare was well on its way to becoming a paperless practice. It began using Greenway’s *PrimeSuite*[®] practice management solution in 2003 and added integrated EHR and interoperability functionality in 2005.

Southern Crescent administrators quickly realized that they wanted to enhance the efficiency gained through EHR implementation in support of their goals of treating more patients more effectively, through improvements to clinical, financial and administrative workflows. The practice was still challenged, however, as it did not implement a front-end solution to address the bottleneck of patients within the waiting room. Patients would wait until they arrived for their appointments to fill out necessary forms. This caused delays in the providers’ schedules, which triggered a domino effect for all patients seen later in the day.

“We had tried to get patients to fill out these forms before they arrived. We sent the paperwork to patients in advance and asked them to mail or fax the documents back three days before their appointments. We even called to remind them. But nothing worked,” says Diana Blondeau, administrator at Southern Crescent Women’s Healthcare. While schedulers, triage nurses and providers were tasked with administrating higher levels of care, they were frustrated with the delays, and the wait times were negatively affecting patient satisfaction.

PrimePatient, powered by Medfusion, supports paperless environment

Southern Crescent Women's Healthcare recognized that technology held the answer to both problems, but leadership wanted to ensure the approach it adopted would be compatible with its EHR. "We didn't want to use a solution that was outside of the EHR," says Blondeau. "We wanted to streamline our processes as much as possible."

The practice began working with Greenway's PrimePatient, powered by Medfusion, in July 2007 and immediately noticed that wait times were beginning to decrease. Working with the existing Southern Crescent Women's Healthcare Web site, Greenway added functionality for patients to access forms online. "We were happy with the Web site we had and didn't want to reinvent the wheel," Blondeau says. "Greenway did a beautiful job of integrating the new features. It is totally seamless." The practice used a number of forms provided by Greenway, but was also able to integrate its own documents as well – like the history and physician intake form.

Patients are encouraged to go online and complete necessary forms a few days before their appointment. An interface between the patient portal and EHR will allow data to automatically migrate from the Web portal and populate designated fields in the medical record.

"Initially, some of our physicians were concerned that PrimePatient wouldn't be effective because they did not think our patient base was computer savvy," Blondeau notes. "That wasn't the case at all. We doubled the number of hits to our Web site almost immediately, and we estimate that nearly 60 percent of our patients now complete their paperwork online."

Already working at "warp speed" and seeing 45 to 50 patients a day, Blondeau says providers appreciate the efficiency PrimePatient offers. "Our wait times have decreased significantly, and we have seen a dramatic reduction in patient and provider complaints about waiting and time wasted."

Southern Crescent Women's Healthcare discovered an unexpected benefit with online form completion: "Some patients were uncomfortable answering a lot of reproductive health questions in a public waiting room," she notes. "And in many cases, the patient may not have all the information she needed at her fingertips – details about her mother's history, for instance. Patients like being able to complete the documents in the privacy of their own home and have the time to collect all the information they need."

Online appointment, refill requests reduces phone calls

Southern Crescent Women's Healthcare also added appointment and prescription refill requests to the PrimePatient solution. Patients can simply log-in, day or night, and submit their request. The practice responds with a confirmation that the request was received and appropriate action taken. "They can get all of this done without either the patient or our staff ever placing a phone call," Blondeau points out. "It has been a tremendous time-

saver, and greatly improved our workflow and productivity.” In addition, the Web-based patient communication solution allows secure “ask a nurse” functionality, as well as confidential messaging to communicate information like lab results.

Greenway and Medfusion provided another significant benefit as well: Southern Crescent Women’s Healthcare is able to monitor referrals via a secure Webportal. In the past, when providers referred patients to other specialists – fetal/maternal physicians, for instance – they could never be sure if their colleagues had received or reviewed patient records that had been forwarded. Often, the specialist would say they had not gotten messages or faxes, and would therefore be unprepared when the patient made an appointment or appeared for a visit.

With *PrimePatient*, the referral request and the patient’s chart is available through the secure portal. Staff can track whether or not the specialist has received the request and accessed the documentation. If not, Southern Crescent Women’s Healthcare can follow-up with a reminder phone call.

Publicity drives acceptance of *PrimePatient* functionality

To encourage use of the *PrimePatient* functionality, Southern Crescent Women’s Healthcare publicizes its Web-based services extensively. A business card with the Web address and a list of all services is given to patients when they are seen. An explanation of online services has been provided to the community at large via Southern Crescent Women’s Healthcare’s regular newsletter. On-hold messages provide incentives for patients to send requests through the Web site. When patients phone for a medication refill, for instance, the on-hold message informs callers that the practice will be happy to process the refill request left via telephone, but that it may take as long as 72 hours. If they were to submit the request via the Web site, on the other hand, it would be completed within 24 hours.

Response has been so positive – from providers, staff and patients – that Southern Crescent Women’s Healthcare plans to begin implementation of the Virtual Office Visit feature in 2009. “This is a trend we are seeing,” notes Blondeau. “Right now, it would be an out-of-pocket expense for patients. However, a CPT code is now available so we can report e-visits. We’re hopeful this means we will also see insurance payment for this service in the near future.”

Overall, Blondeau says the decision to utilize Greenway’s *PrimePatient* has been a good one – and clearly accomplished the “mission” assigned. “Greenway and Medfusion have offered us tremendous benefits – and provides greater convenience to patients. The solutions have met and exceeded our expectations.”