

Peer Perspectives on Electronic Prescribing:

Decision-support functionality, right at your fingertips



SITUATION

Dr. Lorenver Po and Dr. Kenneth Aquilino and their colleagues felt that something had to give. "For years, we had problems with time management, because of the labor-intensive requirements of the prescription-refill process... Plus, we felt that the adoption of an electronic medical record system (EMR) was inevitable — since it represents the wave of the future — so we knew it was time for us to gain some experience with computerized systems to help automate some of our practices," says Dr. Po.

"We realized that using electronic prescribing as the first step toward the eventual computerization of all of our patients' medical records provided a great way to do this," adds Dr. Aquilino. "In addition to streamlining our workflow efficiency, we also felt it would also improve the accuracy and overall safety of the prescription process."

"We'd heard a lot about the possibilities of e-prescribing, and we were looking forward to reducing our dependence on paper files, and the amount of time our staff was spending on phone calls and faxing by making it a 'click-and-send' type of process," he adds.

"E-prescribing is all the buzz in Massachusetts so our patients think we're well ahead of the curve"

— Dr. Po

IMPLEMENTATION

In 2004, the practice implemented PocketScript — an e-prescribing system from Zix — which is certified to connect to the vast majority of U.S. community pharmacies through the Pharmacy Health Information Exchange™, a secure network operated by SureScripts®. This implementation used a mix of personal digital assistants (PDAs) for the prescribers and laptop computers for the medical assistants and other support staff. Internet connectivity is provided through a wireless network.

"After the initial training, we tried a lot of trial-and-error experimentation," says Peg Niejadlik, Coordinator of Clinical Support Services for the practice. "Once you get the hang of it, it's a piece of cake."

"Now all of our doctors are using it, and it's just second nature to them," she adds, saying: "It's so much easier for everyone than the old phone and fax-based process."

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Lorenver Po, M.D.



Kenneth Aquilino, M.D.

- Lorenver Po, M.D., in practice for 10 years, and Kenneth Aquilino, M.D., in practice for 10 years
- Practice Size: 10 prescribers, 20 staff (multi-specialty practice in Holyoke, MA)
- Specialty: Internal Medicine
- Technology Provider & Solution: Zix, PocketScript
- Avg. Daily Rx Volume: 50-100 New Rx/prescriber, 50-100 Refills/prescriber
- Rx Time Savings: Fulfillment of refill requests reduced from 15 minutes to less than 1 minute per.
- E-prescribing efficiencies allows practice to see an additional 3-5 patients each day, "without having to work longer hours," says Aquilino.

RESULTS

The use of electronic prescribing has eliminated most of the intermediary steps that used to be required to fulfill refill requests. For instance, the old process involved pulling a patient's chart, evaluating the request (to see if further lab tests or an office visit might be required), waiting for the doctor's approval, and then phoning or faxing the pharmacy to place the order.

"Now, when a request comes in, a medical assistant still checks to see if further patient action is required, but for routine refill requests, she's then able to set up the refill

through the PocketScript system and send it to the physician's PDA for final authorization and transmission to the pharmacy," says Dr. Aquilino.

"Considering that we each receive between 50 and 100 refill requests each day, we used to face a mountain of files every afternoon. Each request could take up to 15 minutes or more to review and authorize," says Dr. Aquilino. "This is no longer the case, since we can now check the electronic queue every hour or so — and turn each prescription around in under a minute."

"This really keeps things moving throughout the course of the day," adds Dr. Po.

Added functionality, additional benefits

While the prescribers and support staff were all "really excited" about improving their time management, Dr. Po says they were also pleasantly surprised to see "how the use of e-prescribing to send prescriptions directly to the pharmacist's computer has virtually eliminated the confusion and potential errors that used to arise when paper prescriptions were illegibly written or contained abbreviations."

Meanwhile, "quick, electronic access to detailed information about all medications, dosing and drug interactions is also very helpful for prescribers," says Dr. Po. "We're alerted immediately about any potential dangerous drug interactions, so we can either change the drug or caution the patients about potential risks or side effects before they leave the office."

"This is a very handy and important safety feature, because it saves me having to run to the Physician's Desk Reference every time I suspect there's a potential interaction to look into," adds Dr. Aquilino.

Similarly, Dr. Po notes that another important safeguard against potential errors and slowdowns at the pharmacy is the fact that "the system won't let us transmit any prescription until all relevant information fields have been populated. This has greatly reduced delays incurred when pharmacists have to call (and wait for callbacks), in search of missing information on incomplete prescriptions.

The ability to access and review any prescription-related information from any computer in the office allows any staff member to answer questions that arise from patients or others in the office, adds Niejadlik, and this has also helped to streamline the workflow throughout the office considerably.

BEST PRACTICES

- **Get portable.** Combining use of a PDA with desktop PCs allows prescribers and staff to have optimum flexibility in managing prescribing tasks and communicating with patients about their medication therapy.
- **Leverage teamwork to overcome technology issues.** "All of our medical assistants and physicians really supported each other to get up and running with the system, and we all lean on each other for tips and shortcuts, and for troubleshooting," says Aquilino, adding: "While it took some prescribers a bit longer to adapt, once they got the hang of it, the system has proven to be very easy to use for all."
- **Start with e-prescribing to gain comfort with clinical technology.** Both Dr. Po and Dr. Aquilino saw e-prescribing as a way to get comfortable with clinical technology as a stepping stone to the "inevitable" adoption of an Electronic Medical Record (EMR) system.

THE BOTTOM LINE

"We've found that almost every part of the entire prescription process could be streamlined and improved with the use of e-prescribing," says Dr. Po. And, this efficiency has had a direct, bottom-line impact on the practice. Says Dr. Aquilino: "Since implementing our e-prescribing system, we've been able to accept three to five additional patients each day, without having to work longer hours."

"Our patients are also very impressed," says Dr. Po. "And, e-prescribing is all the buzz up here in Massachusetts so our patients think we're well ahead of the curve."