

Practice Profiles on Electronic Prescribing



Dr. Kenneth Adler of Tucson, Arizona, likes technology, and he likes what it has done to improve patient care and overall efficiency in his practice. “With the speed of current computers, broadband connections and improved scanning technology, today’s electronic medical record (EMR) systems are more user-friendly than ever,” he says, “and they keep getting better with the many valuable functions they offer — including automatic chart access, electronic prescribing and refill management.”

Specifically with the prescription renewal (refill) process, “we encourage all our patients to go through the pharmacy when they need refills,” says Dr. Adler. “When the electronic message comes from the pharmacy, the medical assistant can screen it first, to determine if the patient is overdue for follow-up or lab tests. It’s a trigger.” He adds, “The big win for us has been cutting down on all those faxes, by getting electronic messages — which carry complete information — straight from the pharmacy.”

Dr. Adler is particularly thrilled with TouchWorks’ clinical decision support functionality: “The automatic alerts related to drug-drug and drug-allergy interactions are very helpful, because occasionally they remind me of something that may not have been at the top of my mind, and that always provides an additional measure of safety.”

In addition, Dr. Adler likes the formulary-eligibility alerts the system provides. “I’m able to tell the patient — right at the point of care — ‘Your plan doesn’t cover this drug’ or ‘I can save you money by substituting an equivalent drug,’” he says. “We used to get many calls every day from the pharmacy or the patient to say, ‘The drug you prescribed is too expensive, or it’s not covered by my insurance plan.’”

“Anytime you can get rid of a manual process, you eliminate the possibility for human transcription errors — wrong name, wrong medication, wrong dosage, wrong number of refills. All these things can and do happen when you rely on the old-fashioned phone and fax-based prescribing process.” — Dr. Adler

VITAL STATS



Kenneth Adler, M.D.

- ▶ In practice for 22 years
- ▶ Total staff in practice: 12
- ▶ Practice name and specialty: Desert Star Family Health (Tucson, Arizona) — Family medicine
- ▶ Prescribing system used: Allscripts TouchWorks Electronic Medical Record (EMR) system since 2004, and true electronic prescribing capabilities since 2006
- ▶ Number of prescribers using the system: 4
- ▶ Approximate number of new and refill prescriptions written per week: 200–250 per physician

DEMONSTRABLE SAVINGS

Since implementing its EHR system, Dr. Adler’s four-prescriber office has been able to reduce its medical records staff from three to one and has reduced overtime pay for back-office staff and the use of third-party transcription services. Similarly, the increased overall efficiency has helped to increase revenue.

However, he notes that these savings did not come in the first year. “Between data entry and the learning curve, there were many up-front requirements,” he says. “But once you’re past the first six to twelve months, the benefits and the savings start to become evident. The long-term gain more than justifies the short-term pain.”

