

Evans Medical Group, P.C.



Solution overview

Company profile

When Dr. Robert Lamberts joined Evans Medical Group, a primary-care and pediatrics practice, it was owned by a Columbia/HCA hospital. He and his partner grew frustrated with the lack of corporate support for technological and organizational improvements, so in 1996 they bought out the practice. The group has grown rapidly since then; it now includes four physicians who care for 1500 or more patients each month.

Situation

Dr. Lamberts had seen at Indiana University just how much computerized medical records could improve both office efficiency and medical care. Improving the quality of patient care was the driving motivation for him to buy the practice and then upgrade its technology.

Business solution

When they were ready to purchase an electronic medical records (EMR) system, the Evans Medical Group quickly settled on Centricity® Electronic Medical Record (formerly Logician EMR), in part because of recommendations heard at the annual meeting of the American College of Physicians. Dr. Lamberts and his partner liked the stability of the company and its willingness to design the program around physicians' needs, instead of making the doctors conform to the program.

Note

In March 2002, Logician was acquired by GE Healthcare and is now known as Centricity EMR.

Electronic medical records aren't just a recent addition to the Evans Medical Group primary-care/pediatrics practice in Augusta, Georgia. Centricity Electronic Medical Record (EMR) is an integral part of their operation, an important way of improving both patient care and financial health. Evans Medical Group uses the system so effectively that it won the prestigious 2003 Davies Award of Excellence, given by the Healthcare Information and Management Systems Society (HIMSS) to recognize the effective use of technology for improving healthcare.

The question, "How have electronic medical records changed your practice?" is a hard one for Dr. Robert Lamberts to answer. He originally bought out the Evans Medical Group so he could make improvements, such as installing an EMR, and Centricity EMR has been part of his practice since 1996.

Today, Evans uses Centricity EMR not only to eliminate the chart chase, but also to improve patient care: database searches allow the providers to identify people who have missed check-ups, to ensure near-perfect immunization rates, and to monitor medication more effectively.

"People say small practices can't afford EMRs," Dr. Lamberts says. "But our success isn't smoke and mirrors. We did it with our own money, with no outside funds, and made it work. We're financially successful because Centricity EMR is fully integrated into every aspect of our practice."

First steps

Evans Medical Group was one of the first groups to use Centricity EMR, in its very first version. The 1996 program was not as flexible and didn't have as much clinical content as it does today, so Dr. Lamberts and his group paid for some custom data-entry forms and looked for creative ways to do the things he envisioned. Without computers in the exam rooms, they had to create paper templates that doctors could use during exams; handwritten notes and dictation were typed in later.

As Dr. Lamberts got more involved with the Centricity EMR user group, he grew to appreciate the company's approach to software development. Instead of dreaming up a finished product, the Centricity EMR team created a framework and solicited feedback from doctors to flesh it out. Dr. Lamberts became active in the user groups, even serving as a board member and president, and writing clinical content.

One of the most important developments to making the EMR a useful clinical tool was the "encounter form editor," which provided a graphical interface for putting data directly into the Centricity EMR database. The refinement of thin-client terminals and document-scanning improvements also made it easier to integrate Centricity EMR information with clinical routines and documents from other providers and labs.

Centricity EMR at work

After seven years, Centricity EMR is an integral part of the daily routine at Evans Medical Group. The providers use a mix of desktops, thin-client workstations, and laptops on a wireless LAN to access information from anywhere. They can dial in to the system over a secure VPN, allowing them to look up a patient's history from home or hospital in the middle of the night.

The EMR imports demographic data from the practice management system. When the front desk makes an appointment for a new client, Centricity EMR uses that data to create a patient chart without anyone having to type it in. The system also interfaces with their primary lab, so the results are automatically imported into the patient charts.

The providers enter encounter data in several ways: first, the nurses input data from questionnaires that the patients fill out. The physicians also enter data directly into the EMR, either by typing in the exam room while the patient talks, using the drop-down lists or radio buttons to select choices, or typing their findings after the visit. Evans hasn't used a transcriptionist in nearly six years.

Writing prescriptions is easier and safer with Centricity EMR; the software checks for drug interactions and counter indications, flagging the provider if there's a potential problem. Being able to print prescriptions from the system also eliminates handwriting errors. The orders feature of Centricity EMR simplifies lab and radiology tests. The local providers accept Evans Medical Group's printed form as a lab requisition, which lets the practice link problems on the patient's problem list with the ordered test, simplifying authorization.

Even handling patient phone calls is easier with Centricity EMR. This practice developed a custom form with its own protocols, which allows nursing staff to handle most phone calls without physician approval. The chart is always available, and the patient's medication list is always complete and up-to-date.

As an example of the time and cost savings that Centricity EMR provides, Dr. Lamberts estimated how much time his staff would spend pulling and refiling charts to respond to the 1100 patient calls they get in an average month. Savings in staff time and other efficiencies add up to about \$183,000 per year, he calculated.

Improving patient care

The biggest reason for using Centricity EMR, Dr. Lamberts points out, is "it lets me provide good care, and still make money. Usually it's a choice between one and the other."

For example, he points out, people with high cholesterol are prone to thyroid problems, so they need routine thyroid tests. People with hypertension need a kidney function test. "Probably five times today, Centricity EMR reminded me to ask someone, 'Have you had a mammogram?', 'When will we do that bone density test?'"

Patient education benefits from having customized, searchable information right in the exam room. For example, most doctors warn their patients with hypertension about the importance of managing their blood pressure. But imagine how much more effective it is to show the patient a graph illustrating how his risk of heart disease falls (by as much as half) as blood pressure drops from 145/80 to 118/70. "Now, instead of me just throwing another pill at them, they understand why we want good blood pressure control," says Dr. Lamberts.

These issues are part of the established standard of care. Unfortunately, that standard is well beyond what most people can do, because it's so time-consuming.

"Following the standard of care is like walking to Cleveland," Dr. Lamberts explains. "You can do it, but it takes a long time. You need a plane; Centricity EMR is our plane."

"At first, Centricity EMR was just an electronic paper chart. That's okay. But the real benefit is the database – it will remind you of information you couldn't possibly remember alone. The amount of information to manage for each patient is phenomenal."

Dr. Robert Lamberts,
Evans Medical Group, P.C.

Winner of the 2003 HIMSS Davies Award for effective use of healthcare technology

Better care – and better cash flow

In addition to disease management, Centricity EMR's database search capabilities make it easy to provide better care to entire populations.

Because almost half of their practice is pediatrics, Evans Medical Group's business falls off dramatically during the summer. Dr. Lamberts realized it would be a great time to catch everyone up on their routine check-ups, so he created staff incentives for finding patients who needed to come in.

With a quick search in Centricity EMR, the practice was able to find all the diabetics who hadn't been seen in six months; all the people with hypertension who hadn't had a check-up in nine months; all the infants more than three months old who hadn't had their first DTaP shot. The staff then contacted these patients (or their parents) and encouraged them to set up appointments, making last June one of the practice's busiest months ever.

Vaccination rates are up; insurance chart audits consistently get the highest ratings possible; patient volume and quality of care have both increased. These are just a few of the reasons Evans Medical Group is so enthusiastic about the Centricity EMR. And GE Healthcare is proud to recognize this practice for winning the first primary-care Davies Award of Excellence.

Benefits

The reason Evans Medical Group has been so successful with Centricity EMR is that the EMR is fully integrated into its daily operations. For example, the system automatically provides disease-specific clinical reminders, such as the need for people with high cholesterol to have thyroid tests. The staff uses database searches to identify children who have missed wellbaby check-ups. And because Centricity EMR makes information instantly available from anywhere in the office, they no longer have to spend time finding, pulling, and refiling patient charts for every appointment and phone call. Considering all the ways this EMR makes their daily tasks easier and more efficient, Dr. Lamberts estimates that Centricity EMR saves his practice \$183,000/year.

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