



Case Study

McHorse, Foster and Nutson, LLC

PROBLEM

A three-physician practice faced:

- An antiquated practice management (PM) system with limited capabilities
- A vendor whose support was continuously deteriorating
- The vendor's requirement to use an expensive clearinghouse for electronic claims

PURCHASE FACTORS

The practice noted:

- Everyone could easily learn Aprima
- An integrated EHR/PM: one system to learn, no interfaces to manage
- Support team had proven reputation of care
- Template-free design meant staff wouldn't have to tweak Aprima to match physicians' workflows
- Physicians could use handwriting recognition instead of typing

RESULTS

Since implementing Aprima in 2006, the practice has:

- Increased billing an average of more than \$8,000 per physician per month by enabling the physicians to capture codes for higher levels of service
- Eliminated more than \$20,000 in annual operating costs for purchasing paper record supplies, storage space, filing systems and printing
- Received payment from insurers two weeks faster

McHorse, Foster and Nutson, an internal medicine and gastroenterology practice in Austin, Texas, had used the same practice management (PM) system since 1990. The system was even running on its original hardware. Although the staff was familiar with the antiquated menu-driven program, the program was difficult to use and had limitations. The vendor required the practice to use an expensive clearinghouse for electronic claims. In addition, over the years, the vendor's overall support had deteriorated.

That legacy system also put the staff at McHorse, Foster and Nutson at a disadvantage when they wanted to convert to an electronic health record/practice management (EHR/PM) system—they hadn't used a Windows-based system or even a mouse. They didn't have Internet access or e-mail. "It was a humongous change," says practice manager Brenda Smith.

Despite it all, everyone in the practice agreed: it was time to find a new solution.

SUPPORT WAS KEY IN SELECTION CRITERIA

Smith and the physicians at McHorse, Foster and Nutson knew they wanted to buy an EHR/PM system from a company that would actually support them when they had questions or problems. They also knew they wanted an EHR and PM system that worked together. And they wanted the flexibility to interface with outside lab services, internal lab equipment and any clearinghouse.

The practice reviewed a number of alternatives. All of them had technical limitations, a reputation for poor support or costs too high for a three-doctor practice. Then Smith learned about Aprima from Bruce Riegel of Multimedia Healthcare Solutions, an Aprima value-added reseller (VAR).

Riegel and Aprima visited the practice to demonstrate to the doctors and staff how Aprima works. The physicians appreciated the speed and flexibility of Aprima's innovative, template-free design. The administrative staff was impressed by the system's ease of use and the capabilities of its single-database design. They all knew right away that Riegel and Aprima would provide the level of support this practice wanted.

ONE SUMMER, 15 YEARS OF PROGRESS

The transition to Aprima was spread over a three-month period during the summer of 2006. Everyone at the practice knew they had a lot to learn, so they decided on

a phased implementation: PM functions first, involving only the office staff. The EHR would follow for the doctors a month later.

"I'm glad we did," Smith remembers. "We couldn't have managed if the system had been new to everyone at the same time. But I'm glad we didn't wait longer than a month, because we had to enter charges manually during that time. The sooner it was all up, the better."

The Aprima implementation team began, as always, with a workflow analysis. This approach ensured that the system would fit the way the office was organized and would fit each doctor's unique preferences.

Practice management training on Aprima was accomplished in small groups over three days. The practice never stopped seeing patients, even during the PM implementation and initial training. For the EHR, the doctors set aside four mornings for training. The Aprima trainers stayed with them to answer questions. Smith says, "By the third day, we were running with it."

Even though this project brought major change, it didn't take long for everyone to appreciate how much easier their lives were with Aprima. Smith remembers, "By the third month we swore we would never go back."

"We've doubled our co-pay collection because we know what patients owe up front. We don't have to chase down the chart and look it up—the Aprima scheduler tells you."

Brenda Smith
Practice Manager
McHorse, Foster, and
Nutson, LLC

Practice Profile

MCHORSE, FOSTER AND NUTSON

In Austin, Texas, the physician practice of McHorse, Foster and Nutson is renowned. Dr. Tom McHorse, a board-certified gastroenterologist and internist, is a graduate of Baylor College of Medicine in Houston. He is a member of the Seton Board of Trustees and the Seton Physician Hospital Network. He has also won numerous awards, including Physician of the Year and the Gold Cane Award. Dr. McHorse, and internists Dr. Nancy Foster and Dr. Peter Nutson have well-earned reputations for their patient care and medical expertise.

TRANSITION TIME

The practice completed a phased implementation in 3 short months.



ANNUAL SAVINGS

Operating costs reduced



A TRANSFORMED PRACTICE

The doctors love the system, including Dr. McHorse, a seasoned physician with a well-developed charting routine. Although he was a little leery to begin with, “he is probably doing the best job of all,” says Smith.

All the physicians use tablet PCs to chart visits, and Drs. Foster and Nutson also have desktops in their offices. The nurses have their own tablet PCs that they use to enter vital signs, patient histories and other data.

Charts are now complete and legible. Patient data is more secure. In addition, everyone appreciates having all the patient information in one place. “I think it’s better medicine than playing ‘Where’s the lab report?’,” says Smith. Lab results go directly into the patient’s chart. The doctor then sees a message in a special “Lab Results” section of his desktop where it doesn’t get lost among less important messages.

The doctors and nurses also enjoy Aprima’s e-prescribing feature, which saves them time on original prescriptions and refills. “The patient is seen by the nurse and physician, the encounter is documented, the prescription is sent electronically, the service is reviewed and the claim is filed—and it’s just mid afternoon! Very few systems can do that so well and so quickly,” explains Multimedia Healthcare Solutions’ Riegel.

IMPROVED CODING, FASTER PAYMENTS

A few months after the practice installed Aprima, Dr. Nutson went to Smith with a question: His monthly financial report showed more income than he expected. What was going on?

“Now that we actually get paid for every patient visit, our income is way up,” Smith explains. “Our coding is more accurate. In an attempt to be conservative with our Medicare patients, we had been consistently undercoding, but with the documentation Aprima provides, we can be confident that we’re charging correctly. We see much faster payments now that we’re using a totally integrated electronic claims clearinghouse.” In addition, the physicians are using a wider range of codes, because the system has more detailed information and isn’t limited to the numbers printed on a single page.

Even better than accurate coding is eliminating lost visits. Aprima automatically creates insurance claims directly from the visit—no more unbilled superbills left in charts. No more time spent manually entering charges. No more lengthy month-end reports. Smith explains, “In our old system, we had to shut down for half a day to run reports, and then we couldn’t get to that data anymore. In Aprima, I just put in the dates and click one button. Instead of boxes to take to the storage room, I have two envelopes.”

“TOP-NOTCH” TECHNICAL SUPPORT READY TO HELP

Aprima has continued to work with the practice to fine-tune the system. “You get really, really top-notch support,” says Smith. “Everyone has been so very nice and helpful. When we call, we get an answer right away. And when we make a request—‘Can you change this?’ ‘Can you change that?’—they’ve been very accommodating.”



APRIMA IS INDIVIDUALITY

Some physicians in a practice are ready to go entirely electronic. Others are comfortable with their existing workflows. Unlike most EHR/PM systems that take an “all-or-none” approach to adoption, Aprima recognizes the differences. Each doctor chooses the capabilities they alone need. And Aprima’s pricing reflects that flexibility.

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