

Laserfiche ECM Blogs

Efficient Operations

Written by Meghann Wooster

As any practice manager can tell you, keeping track of patients' paper records requires more than a little blood, sweat and tears. Finding information can be difficult, paper and storage space are expensive, and office staff spends a lot of time organizing and updating records so that doctors can stay well-informed.

Such was certainly the case for Dr. Brian Hanson's gastroenterology (GI) practice in Ukiah, CA. One of just two GI doctors within a 90-mile radius in rural northern California, Hanson at times may see more than 200 patients a month. He's a member of several boards and committees, and his practice is affiliated with three different hospitals, two ambulatory surgery centers and two rural healthcare clinics which serve patients in both Mendocino and Lake Counties.

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On any given day, Hanson might be found performing outpatient endoscopic procedures, providing acute inpatient gastroenterology services, or seeing patients for consultations at one of the outlying rural health clinics or in his private office. His practice offers patient education programs, educational material, hospital consultations, 24-hour coverage in case of emergency, multiple offices located near local hospitals, and billing.

Stacie Sturges, Hanson's practice manager, has worked for the gastroenterologist since before he started his own office in 2004. "Dr. Hanson does everything in his power to put his patients first," Sturges explains, "but staying on top of such a huge volume of paperwork made everything more complicated. Having accurate, up-to-date information at our fingertips is essential, and paper-based records just weren't getting the job done.

"Before Laserfiche, a simple phone call from a patient triggered a lot of extra work for the office staff," she adds. "Hunting around for the patient's paper chart, paging through it to find the relevant information, noting the phone call in the record and then presenting everything to the doctor. It took a lot of time."

The practice had considered implementing a traditional electronic medical records (EMR) system, but, as Sturges says, “EMR is so complicated. Everyone knows that.”

Indeed, traditional EMR has a number of serious drawbacks, including:

- Prohibitive costs.
- Overly involved requirements for customization.
- Complicated changes to the existing clinical workflow.

The Natural Approach to EMR

Wary of disrupting patient care in service of complex EMR technology, Sturges discovered a more natural solution to the practice’s information management challenges one day while reading *Healthcare IT News*: “I saw an ad for ‘document management’ and I knew that this was what we desperately needed.”

Best-in-class content management software—with its ability to digitize, organize and store content from across the entire practice—is being adopted by many small medical offices that want an affordable and easy-to-use alternative to traditional EMR. These “hybrid” solutions (so named because they combine content management with other applications such as practice management and e-prescribe) provide a simple, centralized and secure means of managing patient records without complicating the clinical workflow.

“Most doctors’ offices like ours do not have an IT expert in their back pocket,” explains Sturges. “The fact that Laserfiche is so user friendly made it very appealing to us.”

In December 2008, Hanson’s practice purchased and installed the Laserfiche Avante suite from Laserfiche reseller AMI – The Paperless Company. In less than one week, AMI had installed the software and hardware and trained Hanson’s staff. According to Sturges, Hanson’s practice is using Laserfiche to “make our own EMR.”

In terms of the installation process, “The guys at AMI were awesome,” says Sturges. “They listened to what we had to say and organized our solution in a fashion that matched the way we wanted to work. Most importantly, our transition to a paperless office was effortless! The install was completely smooth.”

Today, with Laserfiche and three Fujitsu FI 6140 scanners in place, the office is running like a well-oiled machine. Hanson carries his Fujitsu Tablet PC wherever he goes so that he has real-time access to patient information. This enables him to immediately respond to issues that need attention instead of waiting to get back to the office and dealing with a pile of paper charts.

Technology that Adapts to the Practice

The more closely a software solution mirrors the day-to-day realities of a practice's working methods, the more likely it is to deliver value. Sturges appreciates the flexibility of the Laserfiche solution, stating, "This isn't one of those cookie cutter systems that you have to conform to. Most doctors like making their own decisions, and they don't like being told what to do. Laserfiche allows them to decide how they want to work."

Hanson's practice has configured Laserfiche to handle a number of patient-related tasks, including:

- **Storing scanned records.** The folder structure in the Laserfiche repository is organized by patient. Each patient has a folder that contains subfolders for test results, surgical procedures, X-ray information and so forth. This keeps the information organized and easily accessible by authorized employees.
- **Automatically routing information.** Using Laserfiche Workflow, test results and other important patient updates are automatically sent to Dr. Hanson as soon as they are entered into the system. This speeds Hanson's response to patients and saves staff time.
- **Rapidly processing records.** Hanson's office has customized the document templates in Laserfiche Quick Fields by adding a status field that enables staff to quickly and easily identify urgent messages, call backs and real-time progress notes. In addition, automatic information capture and indexing cuts down on manual data entry and gets information into the system swiftly.
- **Facilitating compliance.** Laserfiche Audit Trail ensures information security and simplifies regulatory compliance. Hanson's practice uses it to stay HIPAA-compliant by following the flow of information, keeping track of changes and noting what needs to be done next.

To Sturges, this is a clear-cut case of technology adapting to the flow of the practice, rather than the other way around. "We don't need all the bells and whistles associated with traditional EMR," she says. "Laserfiche has been a 'meaningful use' solution for us because it gives us exactly what we need to manage our office and improve patient care."

Passing the Benefits Along to Patients

For Hanson's practice, Laserfiche has decreased the costs associated with storing and handling paper records, ensured the safety and accessibility of those records, and

increased the efficiency of the practice's day-to-day operations and employees. Some of the chief benefits of the system include:

- Comprehensive search functionality allows staff to locate records within seconds.
- Remote access to the Laserfiche repository over a secure private network (VPN) gives Dr. Hanson the ability to instantly locate and amend records without pulling other staff members away from their jobs—even when he's not in the office.
- Multiple people can access the same digital record at the same time.
- No electronic records ever get lost.

All of these benefits, however, would be meaningless if they didn't ultimately enhance the quality of patient care.

"Providing top-quality care is of the utmost importance to Dr. Hanson," says Sturges. "We're always asking ourselves, 'How can we better serve this patient?' Many of them are facing really difficult decisions regarding their healthcare. They deserve answers, and they deserve them quickly. With Laserfiche, we coordinate care much faster because patient information is so much easier to find."



Meghann Wooster is a senior writer at Laserfiche, helping information management and IT professionals optimize their use of enterprise content management (ECM) software. Follow her on twitter at @LFMeghann