

Electronic Medical Records**EMRs help physicians stay on top of their work:***Orangeville Family Medicine Clinic experience highlights practice efficiency, more complete and comprehensive patient care**by OntarioMD*

DR. MARCELLA PALAD IS ONE OF SEVEN PHYSICIANS PRACTISING AT THE ORANGEVILLE FAMILY MEDICINE CLINIC. THESE DOCTORS SERVE 12,500 PATIENTS WITH THE ASSISTANCE OF ONE-TO-ONE NURSING, A NURSE PRACTITIONER, A VARIETY OF ALLIED HEALTH-CARE PROFESSIONALS, AND A SEASONED ADMINISTRATIVE TEAM. THE CLINIC OPENED IN 1998, WHEN SEVERAL SOLE PRACTITIONERS MERGED THEIR PRACTICES, MOVED INTO A SINGLE LOCATION, AND STARTED USING AN ELECTRONIC MEDICAL RECORD (EMR). DR. PALAD HAS BEEN AN AVID EMR USER SINCE JOINING THE CLINIC IN 2001.

“An EMR makes it possible for me to provide more complete and comprehensive care,” says Dr. Palad. “It saves time, allowing me to get my work done more quickly and to get home to my family earlier. Finding information quickly in the EMR is vital for me to stay on top of my practice and to avoid having things fall through the cracks.”

Dr. Palad has completely integrated her EMR into her practice: “I could never go back to paper records,” she says. “It just seems like a foreign concept and a very inefficient way of doing things. With an EMR, you can refer to lab or X-ray results — even from two or three years ago — and discuss them with patients. I’m not always searching for the information I need.”

Efficiencies that drive care

Dr. Palad’s EMR makes her more efficient. She uses the visit templates within the EMR that the Orangeville Clinic has created for diabetes, heart failure, pink eye, well baby, and bladder infection visits. These templates remind clinical staff about things that should be

covered, thereby helping to ensure that things are not overlooked. In addition, because standard text entry selections are incorporated into the templates, the doctors update charts more quickly.

Ms. Carol Martyn is the manager of the Orangeville Clinic, and OntarioMD’s first Clinic Manager Peer Leader. She offers advice and guidance to other clinic managers about EMR adoption.

Ms. Martyn also likes the efficiency

out, appointment alerts go into their EMR charts. If these patients subsequently call to book something else, but haven’t yet booked the Pap test, our clerk sees the appointment alert and we can schedule both procedures for the patient’s next appointment.”

Seamless, easy alerts

Over the past 10 years, Dr. Palad and the Orangeville Clinic have used EMRs

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gains of EMRs: “From the office management perspective, with an EMR we have more time to interact with our patients instead of chasing paper,” she says. “It also helps make our booking clerks more efficient. For example, we send out letters to patients who need to book Pap tests. When the letters go

to focus more on preventive care. In a matter of minutes, the EMR search capability can produce lists of patients who are due for such procedures as mammograms, flu shots for those over age 65, childhood immunizations, and fecal occult blood tests. The EMR prints out letters inviting these patients

to book an appointment. If they do not respond by a certain date, the EMR alerts the staff to follow up with telephone calls.

The EMR can also create custom alerts, right down to a specific reminder for a single patient. Dr. Palad explains: "If there is a cyst in a breast that we are supposed to re-ultrasound in three months, I can send myself a post-dated message to order that test and call the patient. For me, that's safer than either leaving it with the patient, or hoping that my memory will serve when the time comes."

The Orangeville Clinic has also implemented clinic-wide custom alerts for patients who are taking certain types of cardiovascular or rheumatoid arthritis medications. These patients are flagged within the EMR for regular tests, be they chest X-rays, echocardiograms, weight checks or other monitoring.

Communications efficiencies

The EMR has helped improve communications between physicians and staff of the Orangeville Clinic, and with patients and other health-care providers.

The EMR contains a shared address book of specialist consultants. This feature simplifies and speeds up referrals, even while sitting with a patient. Dr. Palad explains: "Say you have to find a cardiologist in Barrie. We don't work in Barrie, so we don't know those specialists very well. But this information is right there — in the address book."

The EMR has instant messaging, which the clinic uses to expedite contact with specialists and to avoid telephone tag. Ms. Martyn describes it this way: "There are times when one of our doctors leaves an urgent message for a specialist. When the specialist calls back, the doctor wants to know right away. If the doctor is with a patient when the call comes in, I don't have to intrude. Instead, I send the doctor an instant message that appears on the computer screen. The doctor can then discretely reply to me, typing in for example, 'Ask him to hold. I'll pick up the phone in two seconds.'"

The EMR also makes patient com-

munications more effective. For example, explains Ms. Martyn, "If a patient calls and wants a prescription renewal, sometimes they don't quite say the product name or dosage right. In these cases, I simply pull up the patient's prescription list and send it to the doctor via the EMR. There's no sticky note on a paper file. It's right in the electronic chart for the physician to answer."

Dr. Palad also likes the fact that she can fit patient follow-up work and charting into the way she leads her personal life. In a typical week, she has five to seven hours of additional work to do outside the office. She can do this when it is convenient for her, and she can do it at home if she wants to.

"Being able to log in and finish my dictations from home after putting the kids to sleep helps keep the impact on my life as minimal as possible. I fit it into a time that makes sense. It allows me to keep on top of it. It makes me feel good that I've got it under control," says Dr. Palad.

Similarly, some of her colleagues take their laptop to conventions or on vacation. They log in to the clinic's EMR a few times, allowing them to deal with

urgent items. They enjoy their time away even more knowing that, when they get back, there's not going to be a mountain of work to wade through.

The Orangeville Family Medicine Clinic is proud to share its EMR experience with others in the health-care community. EMRs help the physicians stay on top of their work and it enables them to provide more complete and comprehensive patient care. ■

The OMR EMR Adoption column is provided by OntarioMD, a subsidiary of the OMA. OntarioMD manages Ontario's EMR Adoption Program, funded by eHealth Ontario. For more information on EMR Adoption, visit www.ontariomd.ca, email emrfunding@ontariomd.com, or call toll-free 1.866.744.8668. The deadline for applying is September 30, 2011.

If you would like a Peer Leader to answer your questions and support your adoption of an OntarioMD certified EMR, a free service for physicians, email: peer.leader.program@ontariomd.com. The Peer Leader Program is funded by Canada Health Infoway to offer free mentoring services to help physicians adopt an EMR.