

Eliminate the Paper Trail— One Task at a Time

Orthopedic practice welcomes automated workflows

“Mind-blowing”—that’s how Liz Nunez, EHR director at Sports Medicine Associates of San Antonio, describes her first days on the job. Virtually all administrative activity was still being documented on paper. This was about four years ago. While the orthopedic practice was already using NextGen Enterprise EHR, they were not taking advantage of all the features available to them—not even close.

“They were still using history of present illness (HPI) forms on paper,” recalls Nunez. “Patient demographic intake forms, patient education, lab orders, doctor excuse notes—you name it—all were on paper.”

The practice specializes in diagnosis and treatment of sports-related injuries and offers patient-centered care in state-of-the-art facilities. Their patient population includes professional NBA and NFL athletes, such as members of the San Antonio Spurs basketball team.

Fortunately, Nunez arrived with her own professional experience—she had implemented NextGen Enterprise EHR from the ground up in her previous position at a private, hospital-based clinic. But would she be successful again in initiating the cultural and workflow changes that accompany a shift from paper to computerized administration of medical care?

THE SOLUTION

Soon after she arrived, Liz sat down with the physicians and the staff at Sports Medicine Associates and shared her plan—to eliminate their paper trail. They would no longer rely on sticky notes, paper charts, pages torn out of notebooks, and other such formats that were easily overlooked or lost.

Training staff for an automated world

Nunez knew that every process change, whether large or small, would require staff training. The staff is organized into teams. Each team consists of one physician, one care coordinator, and two medical assistants.

“I prefer to train the entire team,” says Nunez. “Otherwise, by the time you get to that one remaining staff member, it’s just not efficient.”

Schedules present the biggest challenge, especially when surgeries are underway, so Nunez makes herself available on Saturdays, doing whatever it takes to make training happen.

In her transformative work, Nunez used a step-by-step approach, tackling one paper format at a time. Item after item would be incorporated into the electronic workflow.

CLIENT PROFILE

Sports Medicine Associates of San Antonio

- Orthopedic surgeons and sports medicine physicians
- Five clinic locations
- Treatment for a variety of professional and amateur athletes, from school athletes to seniors
- Specialties include orthopedics, sports medicine, concussion therapy, joint preservation, joint replacement, and foot and ankle care

NEXTGEN HEALTHCARE SOLUTION

- NextGen® Enterprise EHR
- Healthwise® Patient Education
- NextGen® Eligibility Verification

HIGHLIGHTS



Transformation

of practice culture by implementing automation to make administration as seamless as possible



Time savings

through automation of a variety of functions from electronic eligibility verification through automation of check-out procedures



Enhanced organization

with electronic filing of HPI forms, test results, patient education materials, and other key documents



Improved HIPAA

compliance through tasking and communication via the patients



Increased staff

motivation to work efficiently and improve accuracy

Fee tickets

Fee tickets were being printed on paper and copied using a copy machine. Nunez implemented an option in NextGen Enterprise EHR for automated fee tickets, which were electronically generated, reviewed by physician in the EHR, and printed. The practice has 13 physicians, each wanted a different fee ticket format, so Nunez had to create 13 different, customized fee tickets.

Excuse notes for patient absences

Nunez explained to the practice's physicians that they would no longer spend time keyboarding excuse notes in Microsoft Word. She implemented the necessary template in NextGen Enterprise EHR, with macros for customizing patient name, appointment date, and so on. Physicians just had to print it out.

HPI forms and test results

These paper documents were being placed into an accordion file according to the patient's last name. Under Nunez's guidance, the documents were scanned into the EHR. The result: crucial documentation became quickly accessible, organized into categories, such as MRI results, x-ray results, authorizations, and so on. This added efficiency made it easier to track a patient's progress.

Patient education

On each floor of the practice, there was a huge binder with every type of exercise—for knees, arms, hips etc. Every time a patient needed an exercise program, and when these materials were needed to fulfill regulatory requirements, staff had to dig through the accordion file.

Nunez implemented use of Healthwise® Patient Education, which is incorporated into NextGen Enterprise. Staff can go to a centralized patient education library in the EHR, find and print the appropriate exercise program for the patient or send it to them via the patient portal, as well as save educational materials to the encounter in the EHR.

Now, if the patient comes back and says, “Hey, I lost that paper with the exercises you gave me. Can you give me another copy?”—it's saved in the electronic chart and just needs to be printed out again.

“When I hear the employees saying, ‘I can't believe we haven't been doing this all this time,’ or, ‘You're saving us so much time with things that we didn't even know NextGen Enterprise EHR can do,’ that personally just lights up my day. It's not only helping their work on a daily basis; it's motivating my colleagues to work more efficiently and improve accuracy as well.”

Liz Nunez
EHR Director
Sports Medicine Associates of San Antonio



Concussion assessment

Sports Medicine Associates treats many patients, especially high school and professional football players, for concussion. Before Nunez came on board, staff used a two-page concussion questionnaire form that took about 20 minutes to complete. Nunez was aware of a specific template for concussion assessment available in NextGen Enterprise EHR. Using this template now saves the staff at least 10 to 15 minutes per patient—a significant savings considering about 60% of patient visits are for diagnosis and treatment of concussions.

Tasking

At one time, the practice relied heavily on email, even for communications regarding tasks in the clinical workflow, such as obtaining authorizations and delivering messages to patients. Nunez educated her colleagues about the value of tasking within the EHR.

Tasking in the EHR creates an accessible record in the electronic patient chart, making information available to the administrative office, billing staff, other clinicians, and the patient via the portal. It enables the team to track when tasks were modified and who made changes. Office staff spend less time on the phone and can run reports on their own. It makes communication more HIPAA-compliant compared with communication by email. Nunez believes that implementing tasking within the EHR has been the most beneficial change for Sports Medicine Associates.

Checkout

Before Nunez's arrival, clinicians would walk patients to the front desk at checkout, and explain what the patient needed to the reception staff—when they should come back, who they needed to see next, their education plan, whether they needed a referral for specialist or physical therapy, and so on. Generally, this approach led to a lot of running back and forth and numerous extra phone calls.

By implementing the checkout template within NextGen Enterprise EHR, Nunez significantly reduced the back and forth and phone calls. Front desk staff could find the information directly in the EHR. Nunez believes that this process change alone saves the practice about 10 to 15 minutes per patient.

THE BENEFITS

According to Nunez, NextGen Enterprise EHR is a huge time saver. NextGen Eligibility Verification, for example, minimizes wait time and speeds up the check-in process. She believes this function alone saves the practice the equivalent of three or four FTEs.

Today, Nunez describes the workflow as seamless. "You're always going to have issues with certain patients as far as insurance goes, but regarding the system itself, with the auto flow, going step-by-step, and performing checks and balances, practice runs much more smoothly," said Nunez.

Nunez says that pushback she has received from her colleagues had more to do with disgruntlement over regulatory compliance than issues with actual EHR functionality. She made it easier for colleagues to fulfill requirements by customizing template features, such as moving fields for documenting fall risk.

"I think about how it would feel if my parents or my family were coming to the practice for care. Knowing these efficiencies were in place would make me feel much safer. It is a great feeling of accomplishment to be part of the changes here."

Liz Nunez
EHR Director
Sports Medicine Associates of San Antonio

Implementing a broad range of process improvements at Sports Medicine Associates gives Nunez a tremendous sense of professional satisfaction.

“Personally, I just enjoy making something better, even if it’s the smallest thing. When I’m at the practice, I’ll do rounds around the office and help everybody, and that just makes me feel great. It makes me look forward to what else we can do to make life better.”

Right now, Nunez is exploring more NextGen Healthcare solutions to add to her administrative arsenal, including NextGen® Mobile, which enables clinicians to document anywhere and anytime, and NextPen®, a smart digital pen that digitizes data on forms and transmits information directly into the EHR.



HOW CAN WE HELP?

Partner with us at **855-510-6398** or **results@nextgen.com**.

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