

Lake Forest Pediatric Associates, Ltd.

The Situation

Lake Forest Pediatric Associates, Ltd., is a privately held group practice with offices in Lake Forest and Vernon Hills, Illinois, with a third, new office opening in Lindenhurst, Illinois, in December 2001. Patient encounters for the practice's 11 physicians and two nurse practitioners average 275 per day. The providers are supported by a billing staff of five full-time employees and a reception staff.

The Challenge

Lake Forest Pediatric Associates previously used a four-part patient encounter form. To save costs, the practice created a single version that listed numerous diagnoses and procedures. "The type was getting so small, no one could read it," said Amy Crowley, executive director.

Another challenge for the practice was capturing charges from physicians' hospital rotations and rounds. The physicians completed cards reporting their hospital visits but were lax in turning them in to the billing office. "We had a four- to five-month back log on hospital charges," Crowley said. "It was very embarrassing to bill parents for newborn exams long after the first or second well-baby checkups."

The Scantron Solution

When Crowley joined Lake Forest Pediatric Associates, the practice was converting to The Medical Manager® physicians' practice management software and the Docuscan patient information system. Bernard Pritzker, M.D., a pediatrician with the practice, explained why they chose Docuscan: "We were looking for a physician interface that would go directly into the computer without having terminals all around our offices," said Pritzker. "This system allows that to happen without having physicians push computer keys."

The Docuscan system includes blank scannable documents; software for creating customized documents for each physician in the practice; and a scanner, which recognizes and interprets data on completed forms, at each office. Patient appointment and provider data is merged onto the documents, which are printed on a laser printer. During a patient encounter, providers simply "bubble in" the appropriate diagnosis and the procedures they performed. The completed documents are read automatically by an OpScan® scanner, reducing both data entry time and errors. The scanned data is then automatically validated and posted into the files of The Medical Manager software.

The Results

"Docuscan helps our front desk staff check out a large number of patients at the same time and do it quickly with few errors," Pritzker said. "All data is entered and a walk-out receipt is automatically generated within seconds at patient check-out."

Through a special program called "Sick Call" the practice has 30 to 60 walk-in patients every morning. Pritzker said: "When a parent brings a child in, the patient information is entered in the computer and a patient encounter form is generated. We no longer have lines of people waiting to check out."

Dr. Pritzker designed the patient encounter documents for the practice. "We have six different overlays for the six most common encounter types. Now our physicians seldom have to look up a code for a diagnosis or a procedure," he said.

Crowley cited numerous other ways the practice has benefited from using the Docuscan system, including a reduction in manual entry and improved quality in claims submitted for reimbursement, resulting in fewer insurance rejections and faster processing of insurance payments.

"We had a rejection history on certain codes from some payers," explained Crowley. "Docuscan, through The Medical Manager, alerts us when there have been rejections in the past with certain payers using certain codes. At check out time, we simply re-enter the charge correctly. We no longer have to rely on people's memories."

According to Crowley, the Docuscan system also is helping Lake Forest Pediatrics capture hospital charges that were previously lost. "Now parents of newborns are billed within 48 hours of a baby's discharge," she said. "Docuscan has made a big difference in our ability to capture those charges."

Crowley said the physicians' transition to using bubble forms was better than she expected. "When I told the senior doctors that the alternative to bubbling forms was to hire someone for \$15,000 per year, they agreed to give it a try. Now they are very comfortable with the forms."

Crowley also said she received outstanding support when the practice encountered problems with the Docuscan system. She said: "On one instance, I called [Scantron] at the end of the day to say our scanner was down, and a replacement scanner was shipped that night. When it arrived the next morning, the help we received to re-initialize the scanner was wonderful."