

*"They (the staff) feel the benefits that come from the instant availability of information from patient health summaries and online health expertise far outweighs the challenges."* Practice Manager

#### Practice Profile

- Based in a capital city
- Three full-time GPs and one part-time GP, practice manager, assistant practice manager, and a practice nurse
- Nine computers, with one on each doctors' desk
- Sees around 560 patients a week
- Has access to e-mail and the Internet via a dedicated phone line
- Uses practice management software

This practice feels that overwhelmingly the most important benefit of adopting an electronic Information Management system is greatly enhanced patient care.

With an efficient IT system the practice says they are able to provide improved patient care, with the doctors using electronic information databases for referrals, recalls and reminders. The doctors say they see such patient management ability as integral to providing good individual, family and community medicine.

Within the consultation rooms the practice says the electronic storage of patient records has resulted in more accurate and detailed health information being available, and allows doctors to plan future health assessments more easily.

Furthermore, the practice says patient care is greatly enhanced through using the electronic health summaries and plans to assist in identifying and recalling patients with chronic diseases such as asthma, diabetes, osteoporosis, mental health, hypertension and cardiovascular disease.

#### Computer System Used For

- Scripts
- Referrals
- Receiving pathology and radiology results
- Completing Health Assessments and Care Plans
- Medication Records
- Patient Recalls and Reminders
- Clinical Audits
- Practice Management

Electronic patient records are maintained with the same level of security and confidentiality as existing paper systems; however electronic storage makes the information more accessible. This makes it easier for the practice to contribute to research activity by undertaking clinical audits, for example it advises the Adverse Drugs Reaction Advisory Committee (ADRAC) online of any adverse drug interactions.

During a consultation doctors use electronic provider directories to access thousands of relevant health and ancillary service providers. Doctors can also access the Internet as required during consultations to locate authoritative

information regarding obscure medications or treatment regimes mentioned by patients.

This practice has invested in the region of \$60,000 and many hours of training in establishing their Information Management capability. That investment purchased computer hardware, software and furniture, with the system being gradually introduced over the past six years starting by firstly introducing it into clinical areas of the practice.

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Aside from improved patient care and management the practice says it now has an improved debt management system and is able to identify and pursue overdue payments in a more effective manner. As a result, staff are freed from paper based manual work and are able to use their time more effectively to provide a higher standard of patient care.

The practice has also made the transition from being a bulk billing practice to fee-for-service and feel that the patients are happy to pay for the service they receive because they are receiving an improved standard of care through the introduction of Information Management processes.

As well as the above, the practice uses electronic banking, online payroll and superannuation payments, and uses financial management software for its accounts.

Prior to implementing the Information Management system the practice says it established clear objectives for exactly what it wanted to achieve by consulting both administration and clinical staff in the practice. Once the goals were established the practice says it then looked for the right systems to achieve those goals.

Once the system was purchased and put in place the practice manager says education and training was then provided to suit the different levels of ability of each staff member and a feedback system established through e-mail, a logbook and verbally.

The practice invested in high quality hardware and software, provided a backup system and drew up a disaster recovery plan to ensure that if technological problems occurred they could be dealt with promptly.

A number of staff were provided with specific training in how to deal with minor problems and a number of external contacts were established for when difficulties arise that required expertise not available in-house.

The particular doctor who has been the driving force behind setting up and maintaining the system continues to devote time to maintaining and improving the system, and staff are kept fully aware of how the system is being developed.

The practice manager says that some of the ongoing challenges of maintaining the system include technical issues such as the future upgrades of clinical software and the continuing need to keep up-to-date with technological developments. These issues have been embraced by all practice staff.

Balanced against the challenges of maintaining the system for the staff are the benefits of using Information Management systems, which include more efficient work practices and a more interesting and flexible work environment.