

“Paper notes are a major limitation especially when trying to identify risk factors and practice preventative medicine. Now that we give patients a copy of their records, and chart their progress after each consultation, our compliance rates are almost 100 percent.” Doctor

Practice Profile

- Based in a capital city
- One full-time GP, one part-time GP, practice manager, and a nurse technician
- Five computers, with one on the doctors' desk
- Sees around 125 patients a week
- Has access to e-mail and the Internet

This practice differs from the usual General Practice in that it focuses solely on patients with cardio vascular conditions, complicated by multiple risk factors such as diabetes. It was established in 1995 by a GP with an interest in cardiology.

Right from its inception the development of electronic systems within the practice have played a key role in its improved Information Management. So integral is the IM/IT system to the practice the GP says they could not offer the level of care they do without it. “I worked on developing the software with a programmer [and

a GP] in 1995 when I was establishing the practice; this ensured that the system did exactly what I needed it to do in the practice.”

The doctor says the greatest benefit of being involved in the development of the software is they have been able to introduce a series of automated prompts into the software, as a form of clinical decision support, to aid the doctor during consultations.

Computer System Used For

- Scripts
- Referrals
- Receiving pathology results
- Completing Health Assessments and Care Plans
- Medication Records
- Clinical Audits

When a patient comes to the practice the doctor spends an hour with them in the initial consultation, completing the normal checks such as patient history and health statistics. The initial consultation then involves going through a detailed interview with the patient, based on the computer program guiding the doctor to follow their investigation in a predetermined way.

“Often what the patient complains of is very subtle and it can be missed, what the program does is work basically like a pilot's checklist

before takeoff, prompting the doctor to ask all the right questions.” The software then helps the doctor decide on how to develop the patient's treatment.

When the consultation is finished, and treatment initiated, the doctor prints off a copy of the patient's medical records, which they give to them to take home. Every time the patient returns to the practice the medical record is further updated – in electronic form for the doctor and in paper form for the patient, which they keep and add to their existing notes.

Acknowledging that giving a patient a copy of their record after every consultation is unique, the doctor says the system has two great benefits:

1. A patient can take their record with them when they go to another doctor, providing the entire patient's health and treatment history for the new doctor.
2. The record provides the patient with feedback in terms of medication doses and graphing of a patient's progress over time in terms of their health statistics such as blood pressure and cholesterol.

The doctor says: "This [giving patients their records] is a great tool for long-term management. It is appreciated by patients, as they can see how they are progressing, and it assists in improving treatment compliance rates." Without the Information Management system the doctor says they could not offer such a service to their patients. "Starting in 1995, when I left general practice and established this practice, I knew that I had to go with computers to do what I wanted."

Computers within the practice are networked and placed in each of the treatment rooms, so both the doctors, and the nurse technician, can have access to the appropriate information when dealing with patients, which allows medical staff to rotate through the clinical rooms, the doctor says.

The doctor says they have no problem with the security measures surrounding a paperless office. Patient records are more secure in electronic form they believe, because in paper form they are easily accessible, whereas on a computer password access prevents any unauthorised people from viewing files. A tape-backup is made of the system every night to guard against inadvertent deletions or loss of data due to such things as power surges.

Apart from the clinical side of the practice, the doctor says, the benefits of an IM/IT system are obvious when it comes to the administration of the business. Having worked in practices since 1985 that have always computerised their accounting and billing systems they can see no other way of doing it.

Other obvious benefits of using an IM/IT system are in terms of time-management, with both the doctors and administration staff having the required information at their fingertips, saving the need for time spent on filing or scanning.

The system also allows easy identification of patients for recalls and reminders and clinical audits. "I can't imagine working the way we do now with a manual system, we wouldn't know what was happening in the practice if we did."