FAMILY PRACTICE

Fannett Medical Center
Fannett, Texas

CLINIC PROFILE

Providers: Two Nurse Practitioner providers
Specialties Served: Family practice
AdvancedMD Client Since: 2017
Technology Profile: After taking over an established 40-year-old practice from a retiring physician, providers Daisy and Zeus Arco quickly realized the existing software system they inherited was inadequate to efficiently run the practice. This was primarily because it was still highly paper-based. Another popular system was recommended but proved to be overly expensive and lacking in revenue cycle management (RCM) features. A colleague of Daisy's recommended AdvancedMD, and the clinic adopted the entire suite, including billing/RCM and insurance eligibility, scheduling and EHR with ePrescribing. The seamless integration of the system and cloud-based delivery have proven invaluable in helping the practice run effectively, particularly during natural disasters that periodically hit their region.
Practice Highlights: Fannett Medical Center is a rural clinic outside of Beaumont, TX mainly helping underserved patients in a family medicine setting. Daisy Arco, Family Nurse Practitioner, and Zeus Arco, Adult Gerontology Nurse Practitioner provide a full range of family medicine primary care services for patients of all ages. Shortly after transitioning into the practice in early 2017, the Arcos quickly created a natural disaster contingency plan centered on the AdvancedMD cloud-based software platform. This robust solution allowed them to continue providing urgent medical services in the aftermath of Hurricane Harvey when most other area clinics and many hospitals were shut down.

INHERITED PROBLEMS: SYSTEMS INADEQUATE FOR PRACTICE AND CLINIC MANAGEMENT; NO NATURAL DISASTER CONTINGENCY PLAN

Fannett Medical Center is a rural clinic outside of Beaumont, TX mainly helping underserved patients in a family medicine setting. The patient mix skews toward Medicare and Medicaid coverage with some private insurance. The clinic provides a full range of family medicine primary care services for all ages.

Daisy Arco, Family Nurse Practitioner, and Zeus Arco, Adult Gerontology Nurse Practitioner took over the practice in 2017 from the founding physician who retired after 40 years of serving this community. While the clinic was well run overall, the automation systems were inadequate, and the practice lacked a contingency plan to prepare for natural disasters, including patient record safety and access. This area of South Texas is highly prone to hurricanes, having endured four major storm incidents in the previous 18 years.

SOFTWARE EVALUATION

The replacement software platform first evaluated by the clinic proved to be lacking on several key fronts. "The initial system we looked at was very popular, but very expensive, and I was uncomfortable with the billing portion of the solution," said Daisy. A colleague recommended AdvancedMD, which soon proved to meet not only the key criteria for efficient clinic operation and patient care, but proved invaluable in providing emergency care several months later in the aftermath of Hurricane Harvey when most local clinics and even many hospitals were unable to remain open.

In their planning and system selection process, the practice established these key criteria:

CLOUD-BASED

The software platform must be completely cloud-based and securely accessible through a standard Internet connection. "When Daisy presented AdvancedMD to me, I was happy that we didn't have to maintain office-based software," said Zeus. "A large practice close by running office-based software lost everything in the flood because they were closed for two weeks. Even their insurance won't cover the business loss."

Internet speed was another concern for the practice. "We only have residential DSL available, so it was a big concern for us," said Zeus. "I thought it might not work or would take forever to get a record, but we tried it and it worked great."

INTEGRATED FEATURES

The system must seamlessly integrate across all key functions, in order to efficiently manage patient care, practice management and patient communication on a daily basis, as well as in a disaster situation. Through the evaluation process, AdvancedMD proved superior in delivering this integration in these key areas:

- Billing
- Scheduling
- Eligibility
- EHR, including e-prescribing
- Labs and imaging
- Patient communication (portal)

BRIGHT SPOT IN HURRICANE HARVEY

Hurricane Harvey made landfall in South Texas in late August 2017 as a category 4 tropical storm. Within days torrential rains caused extensive flooding in Houston and the surrounding areas, resulting in the worst flooding in over 400 years.

Fannett Medical Center was one of the few facilities that did not close because of flooding. Several area hospitals and ERs were unable to remain open, and state and national guard relief efforts were paralyzed. "People were evacuated to churches, and then even those churches had to be closed because the water was rising so fast," said Daisy.

Within a day and a half of the hurricane, Fannett Medical Center was open for emergency operations. "We opened Friday afternoon. We heard from people we were the only one open in the whole southeast of Texas. Even hospitals were shut down," said Daisy. "We saw 16 patients that first afternoon."

AdvancedMD was an important part of that quick response. "All we needed was the Internet and power and we could open AdvancedMD, cloud- based, and we were able to look up our patients' medical records. Daisy was able to prescribe medication," said Zeus. The clinic had prepared for this type of situation by previously installing mobile hot-spot Wi-Fi technology in the clinic.

"Many of our patients lost their medications in the flooding when they were evacuated from their homes," said Daisy. "They were displaced to Texarkana, Dallas, Tennessee – everywhere." These patients messaged the clinic through the AdvancedMD patient portal or the local pharmacy and requested a refill. "The NPI goes straight into our system, and we were able to refill the medication quickly, no matter where the patient was temporarily staying," said Daisy.

Before reopening that Friday, the providers contacted the office billing specialist by cell phone. She lived on the other side of a bridge that had collapsed in the flood. "Using the AdvancedMD cloud platform from her home, she had already contacted patients who were scheduled for visits and alerted them to the situation," said Zeus. "After we spoke, she was able to reschedule them for times we knew we would be re-opened and available." Using the remote capability of the system, over the next several days the billing specialist was also able to complete insurance verification and billing follow-up for visits that were taking place in the clinic on the other side of the floodwaters.

"That's the beauty of a cloud-based EHR," said Zeus. "During a disaster, as long as you plan ahead, you can run off a generator and portable Internet and it's not a problem at all. You can still function. You could put a tent outside with a laptop and a printer and you're good to go. That's all you need."

Planning For Disaster

Through years of experience as a provider in the Texas penal system, Zeus Arco is familiar with detailed disaster preparation plans created for those facilities. Combined with Daisy Arco's experience in electronic medical record systems, they created a medical practice contingency plan checklist for natural disaster preparation. Here's a summary of their recommendations:

Disaster Preparation Contingency Plan Checklist

1. Create an emergency communication and initial response plan. Think through the steps required for you and your staff to quickly reach each other and organize to respond in the most effective way. Zeus Arco says, "Ask your staff to provide multiple emergency points of contact information. Collect emails, Facebook profiles, cell phone numbers, family member contacts, etc. for each key member of the staff and make the information accessible in case of emergency."

2. Ensure you have an emergency backup power source. Many different generator options are available. Research and install one that will give you adequate power to operate on an emergency basis, including sufficient fuel. Keep in mind refrigeration of vaccines and other temperature-sensitive items.

3. Move to the cloud. Move your practice automation and EHR to a cloud-based system. With records securely stored in the cloud and accessed through the Internet, they will be safe regardless of what happens to the computer devices in the clinic.

4. Consider moving to laptops or tablet devices. In case of a disaster-related power outage your devices will continue to work for a number of hours, whereas desktop machines will be inoperable. Recharging portable devices requires much less power as well.

5. Move to a completely integrated practice automation platform. In case of an emergency it's important to access not only the patient clinical records, but scheduling (to alert scheduled patients of plans and changes) prescribing (including remote scripting for displaced patients), labs and imaging, patient communications and billing and insurance eligibility.