

INTERNAL MEDICINE

Center for Balanced Health

Manhattan, New York

CLINIC PROFILE

Providers: 10 Provider practice

Specialties Served: Multi specialty, Internal Medicine

AdvancedMD Client Since: 2008

Technology Profile: The clinic transitioned from a paper-based system to the AdvancedMD cloud practice management system, including scheduling, eligibility verification and sophisticated claims and billing. The fully integrated EHR provided a simple path for migration to full automation. Dr. Berkowitz and staff access the system anytime, anywhere through the cloud without the need for additional on-site servers and computer equipment.

Practice Highlights: Dr. Keith Berkowitz started the Center for Balanced Health to continue the healthcare philosophy of diet guru, Dr. Robert Atkins. This practice is an internal medical center with expertise in both conventional and complementary medical approaches. The clinic provides a wide variety of specialists including internal medicine, pain management, podiatry, anti-aging medicine, allergy and immunology, sports medicine, chiropractic, physical therapy and psychiatry.

ABSTRACT

This busy two-office, ten-provider, multi-specialty practice faced the dilemma of growing profitably while still delivering the highest possible patient satisfaction. Dr. Keith Berkowitz, founder and medical director of the Center for Balanced Health, felt a totally paper-based system seriously hampered his vision, resulting in greatly extended outstanding reimbursement collection and long hours at the office finishing workflows. The AdvancedMD cloud system automated all key workflows, freeing staff to focus on patients and growth. The clinic now operates with one fewer FTE staff, collects reimbursements in a timely manner, and provides outstanding service to a highly demanding patient population. A seamlessly integrated EHR provided a simple migration path to total automation, with additional efficiency and lifestyle improvements.

THE PROBLEM

The Center for Balanced Health, located in the heart of Manhattan, has built a thriving and growing patient roster through catering to the unique demands of NYC residents. "Running a practice in New York City is more challenging than other locations," said Dr. Keith Berkowitz, internist, and founder and medical director of the Center for Balanced Health. "Patients are very well-educated and well-informed, and they want to see results quickly. They want to access your staff quickly. They want to be able to come in quickly. The practice has to run extremely efficiently and be accessible to them."

In this highly competitive city, competition for patients is a reality for most doctors. "There is more competition than ever before" said Dr. Berkowitz. "The underlying premise is this is a business, and if people aren't happy they're not going to come back. Efficiency and patient satisfaction are critical to being successful."

Positive Patient Experience Mandate

A positive patient experience starts with providing staff with the tools and processes that allow them to deliver outstanding patient service. "We focus on making sure our staff have what they need to get their jobs done, and that they're happy where they're working," said Dr. Berkowitz. "That makes for happy patients who come back, and tell their friends and colleagues about their experience here."



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Keith Berkowitz, MD

Roadblocks to productive staff and happy patients came in several forms. First and foremost was the inefficiency of a paper system. “The toughest part was that everything was paper-driven – from the schedule to paper insurance forms to handwritten prescriptions. It became very inefficient,” said Dr. Berkowitz. “Instead of being able to focus on the patient, we were trying to figure out their insurance or deal with regulations and forms. It was frustrating for both patients and staff.”

The paper-based system also presented additional challenges from a liability standpoint. Efficient coordination of care requires tracking information that often resides in different records, files and systems. The probability that something gets overlooked is magnified in this scenario.

Billing and Coding Bottleneck

Lack of adequate automation also negatively impacted the practice’s ability to efficiently handle complex billing and coding often associated with this specialty. “You have a lot more diverse problems and associated codes in internal medicine. Plus insurance companies often want documentation on E&M coding to justify a bill,” said Dr. Berkowitz. “We spent a lot of time looking things up, writing things down, and documenting.”

Claims turnaround – particularly for Medicare bills – suffered significantly under the paper-based system. “The process was to keep refilling out forms over and over again as they would be returned to us,” said Dr. Berkowitz. “Many of our Medicare bills would be outstanding for six months or more. It was draining a couple of hours of staff time a day, not to mention our profitability.”

Multi-office Maze

The addition of a second office placed additional strain on the system, increasing inefficiencies, impacting the physician’s responsiveness to patients, and even his own personal time. “I am out of the office frequently, and I had these bulky charts that I couldn’t carry around with me. If a patient called, I had to say, ‘I’m sorry, I don’t have your chart with me. I’ll have to call you back tomorrow,’” said Dr. Berkowitz. “Plus, at the end of the day I frequently had to go back to the morning office to finish workflow. I was spending a lot of extra time in the office.”

Cost Efficiency Pressure

Today’s highly regulated healthcare environment has put significant increased pressure on the cost structure of small practices. “We don’t have the same economies of scale as a big practice,” said Dr. Berkowitz. “We’re not sharing costs, so it’s very important that the system be as efficient as possible. And ours wasn’t.”

The AdvancedMD Solution

The original impetus for the practice to automate came from the significant delays they were experiencing in receiving Medicare reimbursements. “We recognized the paper forms we were submitting to Medicare weren’t being processed, and we needed to do something about it,” said Dr. Berkowitz. “We went to AdvancedMD to start our practice management and billing, and soon realized that it would be an easy transition to an EHR from the same company.”

Today the clinic runs the complete AdvancedMD cloud software suite, including scheduling, eligibility verification, sophisticated claims and billing, and EHR. The physician and staff access the system anytime, anywhere through the cloud without the need for additional on-site servers and computer equipment. All data is automatically backed up and managed in bank-grade data centers protected by high-security access.

THE OUTCOME

Moving to the AdvancedMD system allowed Dr. Berkowitz’s practice to continue to profitably expand while providing outstanding patient experience and staff productivity and satisfaction.

Cloud Freedom, Patient Focus

The AdvancedMD cloud system eliminated a significant amount of manual, paper-based workflow from the practice, freeing the physician and staff to focus on their top priority: patient satisfaction.

“AdvancedMD has eliminated and simplified much of the manual back office workload, and our workflows have become much better all around,” said Dr. Berkowitz. “The more time I spend with patients rather than other things, the better my practice is going to be. Having great processes and great patient workflow has helped me grow my practice every year – even in times of economic decline.”

A major part of this success hinges on the fact that automated workflows provide a better work environment for the staff, freeing them from tedious tasks that took their focus off patient care. “We talk about the importance of the doctor-patient interaction. But the staff interaction is just as important,” said Dr. Berkowitz. “The staff find the new system provides a very good working environment where they get to spend more time in positive interaction with patients.”

Dr. Berkowitz also feels more confident that liability risk is reduced by automated workflows within the system. “The labs, the scans, the chart are all in one place, so you’re less likely to miss things,” he stated. “I think it gives you better coordination of care. For example, abnormal lab results are flagged in advance, and you can’t get rid of them until you have actually looked at them and signed off. So it kind of nudges you inherently to look at those results quickly.”

Billing and Coding Freedom

AdvancedMD helped the practice address billing workflow issues, significantly reducing time spent on billing tasks. “Our billing process is much easier, from the staff perspective,” said Dr. Berkowitz. “A Medicare billing process that may have taken a couple hours a day now takes only a few minutes a day.”

E&M coding documentation has also helped streamline workflow and improve financial performance. “Everything is well organized and easy to get to, so providing the detail requested by insurance providers is quick and simple to justify,” said Dr. Berkowitz. “And we aren’t constantly looking up codes like before. Now it’s all right there.”

Reimbursement turnaround time also significantly improved with the AdvancedMD billing system. Medicare reimbursements that had routinely been on a six-month turnaround cycle, were collected in a fraction of the time. “We’re able to turn around billing questions or problems immediately,” said Dr. Berkowitz. “This really helps our bottom line, but also improves patient service. When a patient has a billing or insurance rejection question, we can print out the information in two seconds, or send it to them electronically.”

Seamless Multi-Office Solution

Information from multiple locations is now accessible from any Internet device, anytime from anywhere. The improvement in efficiency, patient service and physician lifestyle is significant.

“I can do my patient callbacks or changes from anywhere, which is a big deal,” said Dr. Berkowitz. “If someone calls me on my cell phone I can easily say, ‘OK, let me look up your labs.’ That allows me to do things in real time. From a patient satisfaction and care perspective that’s outstanding.”

The system also eliminates the need for the physician to be in the office to complete work, greatly improving his time utilization and personal lifestyle. “The nice thing about it is it has allowed me to be more efficient both in and out of the office,” said Dr. Berkowitz. “Now I don’t have to come back into the office, which is great for my family and everything else. It saves me a lot of time – probably an hour a day on the three days I work in the second office.”

Positive ROI

Growth and high patient satisfaction haven’t come at the expense of profitability for this practice. The AdvancedMD system has also helped improve overall cost efficiency and bottom line results. “I’ve been able to combine my patient coordinator with my billing coordinator so I’m actually saving one fulltime person, which is huge,” said Dr. Berkowitz.

“Because I am more efficient, I am able to push the technology to more back office work that I used to do myself. That allows me to see more patients more efficiently, so there’s a tremendous improvement in ROI. My practice has definitely grown in the last couple years since I’ve been using AdvancedMD, and patient satisfaction at the same time has increased.”