

PEDIATRICS

Diablo Valley Pediatrics

Antioch, Brentwood & Concord, California

CLINIC PROFILE


Providers: Seven physicians

Specialties Served: Pediatrics

AdvancedMD Client Since: 2009

Technology Profile: The practice initially installed the AdvancedMD cloud practice management solution in 2009, with the long-range vision of running a fully-integrated solution. The integrated EHR was added in 2011 and the system includes fully-integrated cloud billing, scheduling, practice management, EHR, labs, ePrescribing and eEligibility. Providers and staff access the system anytime, anywhere through the cloud without the need for additional onsite servers and computer equipment.

Practice Highlights: The group provides comprehensive pediatric care in three different locations. Physicians rotate in order to maximize availability to patients in each locale.



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ABSTRACT

This pediatrics group needed a way to significantly reduce manual process inefficiencies inherent in dealing with a multi-provider, multi-site practice. Pediatrics-specific demands required a completely integrated system that would facilitate not only instant access to patient charts, but would easily facilitate scheduling and managing future visits based on need while streamlining billing. A thorough technology search identified AdvancedMD as the platform capable of providing a completely integrated solution, including billing, scheduling, practice management and EHR in a cloud system accessible anytime, anywhere and easily customized to the unique demands of pediatrics.

THE PROBLEM

This multi-physician, multi-location practice found itself constantly hampered by the inability to share patient information, labs and referrals between providers and sites, and still maintain efficient centralized billing. While implementing EHR was an obvious high-level solution, many specialty-specific requirements complicated the decision.

The ability to customize EHR templates to specific pediatrics requirements was crucial in order to avoid creating extra work for the providers. “The stock templates had extra stuff we didn’t need or lacked things we did need,” said Dr. Ryan Tracy, pediatrician at Diablo Valley Pediatrics. “The workaround is probably only a couple of minutes when you’re with a patient, but those minutes really start to add up. With every little part of your template there are minutes to be gained or lost, and that’s what can be the deal breaker with how well the EHR works.”

For this practice, it was also important to have the flexibility to quickly fine-tune the EHR based on patient interaction. “I noticed that what worked beautifully in a quiet computer room did not work very well when you’re in the room with a patient – and that’s the key thing,” said Dr. Tracy. “You have to document on the fly and be done. Otherwise you’ll double your work.”

With seven doctors rotating between three offices, there is a fair amount of covering for each other based on schedules and patient location. With paper charts this presents a number of significant challenges.

“It’s very much a silo with everything stuck in one office,” said Dr. Tracy. “I’m not going to come in after work or the day before to figure out my next day’s visits – that would be ridiculous amounts of work. So you’d do it on the fly. Sometimes it worked really well and sometimes it didn’t work very well. It’s almost like you’re a solo practitioner among a group.”

For pediatrics, lack of access to data stuck in paper charts impacts not only the ability to provide the best patient care, but the bottom line as well. “Take flu season, when we have to take the risk and put out the money to buy vaccine,” said Dr. Tracy. “How many vaccines did we give last year? What ages? What were the breakdowns? How much do we order? Not having those numbers is a fundamental deficit when you’re on paper.”

Minimizing phone time with patients, and being able to quickly schedule appointments or follow-ups is crucial for efficient utilization of physician time. Having that information in separate systems makes this task especially difficult. “People don’t like to be stuck on the phone,” said Dr. Tracy. “So the quicker we can get their information, find out what their needs are, what kind of appointment they need, and get that into the computer, the better. That’s crucial for us as providers to manage the number of patients we need to and take care of them adequately. Non-integrated systems make that very difficult.”

Billing

Slow billing turnaround was a continual negative financial drain on the practice due to lack of visibility into even minor errors that created delays in resolving claims issues. “Our billing process was very frustrating because of missed charges and the long period of time waiting to get results back as to whether it was denied or accepted,” said Nancy Sutter, office manager for Diablo Valley Pediatrics. “If anything was wrong – if the birth date, ID, gender, etc. was wrong – by the time they got back to us it was 30 to 45 days.”

Billing secondary insurance – a common occurrence in pediatrics practice – was a time-consuming, manual process. “We didn’t have access to the explanation of benefits on the website, so we actually had to pull them out of boxes in the old filing system. It was very cumbersome,” said Therese Musgrave, billing manager for the practice. “It was like being a private detective to find the EOB and then figure out where the money was. It took a lot longer.”

Scheduling and billing in pediatrics gets very complex due to the need to track both patient and parents, and keep up with changes in family status and related insurances, particularly with a system incapable of easily tracking updates. “We have

blended families with different names – they’d have a divorce and come in with another person – and keeping track of who belonged with whom and which insurance was very hard,” said Sutter. “Our system linked them all wrong.”

Keeping track of records over long periods of time and having them readily accessible is another requirement unique to pediatrics. “Usually, in a family practice when patients leave they’re not coming back 10 or 15 years later asking for shot records or other updates,” said Sutter. “Parents want immediate information.”

Tracking labs was also a manual process, fraught with logistical problems. “Usually, it was just by faxed to us and we’d put it on the doctor’s desk,” said Sutter. “If it was a STAT we’d have to fax it to the other office where the doctor was and wait for them to reply.”

Remote Access

Lack of remote access to a patient’s medical records presents a challenge in making on-call decisions when parents call in with a sick child. “The parents don’t necessarily have the medical knowledge of what we really need to know to give good sound advice and tell them what they should or shouldn’t do,” said Dr. Tracy.

Being tied to paper charts also impacts personal time and lifestyle of busy pediatricians. “With the paper chart, if you had a crazy day you’d have to go back to the office to do your charting or, God forbid, take the charts out of the office which is a no-no,” said Dr. Tracy. “Things would get lost and it’s not very good for patient care.”

The AdvancedMD Solution

The practice initially addressed the practice management and billing issues in searching for a solution, but quickly recognized the need for a completely integrated system with everything linked and accessible from one spot.

“We were very thorough in looking at other vendors before coming onto AdvancedMD,” said Dr. Tracy. “One of the key reasons we chose AdvancedMD is the capability of linking

systems. We love all the different tools to look up patients and get their information. And the eligibility button is a huge savings.”

The AdvancedMD cloud billing, scheduling and practice management system was installed first, followed by the integrated EHR. The solution includes integrated lab, e-prescribe and e-eligibility capabilities.

THE OUTCOME

Improvements delivered by the AdvancedMD fully integrated system have significantly improved practice efficiencies, profitability and even quality of life for the providers.

Customized Template Flexibility

The AdvancedMD EHR provides the group with the capability to improve patient care by practicing more consistently across patients and providers. “With the templates we can create a very structured way of recording our visits, procedures, what vaccines we give, and what we anticipate they’ll need in the future,” said Dr. Tracy. “We can do it in a less variable way which means we’ll all be practicing more consistently.”

Tight integration between the EHR and practice management systems resolves one of the biggest challenges in efficient patient management in pediatrics. “One of the biggest things in pediatrics is planning for and communicating what appointments they will need next – for example screening lipids and vaccinations,” said Dr. Tracy. “The direct tie-in with our practice manager allows us to communicate that right into the management and scheduling side. It’s nice because it was designed to basically integrate one into the other.”

Integrated, Anywhere Access

Anytime, anywhere access to patient records solves a myriad of logistical challenges for multi-site and on-call work for the practitioners and staff. “A lot of patients will follow docs to different offices,” said Sutter. “We don’t have to fax chart notes and labs – everything is right there for the provider to look at. It makes it much easier than trying to guess what’s going on.”

The providers appreciate the convenience, as well as the relevant data that aids their decision-making. “It’s nice to have that information available to us in electronic format so that we can know that, for example, this kid with a fever is also a child who maybe has had a very severe stormy medical course and we may need to be a bit more cautious with them compared to another child with a fever,” said Dr. Tracy.

Lab results are immediately accessible by all doctors, regardless of time or location. “Now we just scan labs as they come in and put them in the electronic review bin and the doctors see them right away,” said Sutter.

Billing Mastery

The AdvancedMD claims inspector technology has significantly reduced the time and effort required to clear claims through the system and receive payment, by ensuring that claims are accurate prior to submittal. “The claim is scrubbed before it’s even sent out, and we know automatically if it will be sent back,” said Musgrave. “That’s where the savings are in turnaround time. We’re now being paid within one to two weeks.”

EOB detective work also ceased for the staff with the implementation of the billing/practice management system. “Now we have the explanation of benefits at our fingertips, and we can get it right through AdvancedMD, said Musgrave. “That is a huge saving for us instead of actually have to dig through boxes.”

Remittance review quickly verifies that all payments have been accounted for. “It’s nice to be able to track the checks, and hit that nice button that says ‘process OK’ and have it work,” said Musgrave. “Those are time-saving details with AdvancedMD that we did not have with the old system.”

The impact of the many efficiencies afforded by the AdvancedMD system is a net reduction in the headcount required in billing. “Using AdvancedMD compared to our old system we have actually downsized one whole body in the billing department,” said Musgrave. “It’s cost efficient for our physicians and has been a huge savings for us.”

Streamlined Scheduling

The AdvancedMD scheduler has streamlined complex scheduling tasks among multiple locations. “All the offices can see what every office does. If they call here, we can schedule them for any of the doctors in any of the offices,” said Sutter. “Accommodating changes is very quick too, just moving them around, blocking out times.”

The scheduling system has also accelerated patient flow and improved billing processes. “With the new scheduler and EHR, we get a lot of the information up front, so when the patient comes in, unless they have something changed insurance-wise they’re already verified and ready to be taken back right away,” said Sutter. “It also makes it much easier for billing.”

Most importantly, the AdvancedMD system has resolved the blended-family tracking problem for the practice. “On the old system the accounts were all together (blended families, different names,” said Sutter. “AdvancedMD keeps everybody separate. It makes scheduling so much easier.”

Quality of Life

Integrated system efficiencies even reach into the physician’s personal lives, freeing up time that was previously spent grappling with paper charts and records. “I think it changes how you practice, because you aren’t tied to where the charts are,” said Dr. Tracy. “If you had a crazy day, you can still go home and pick up your kids from school, cook dinner and then get your work done in the evening – which you couldn’t do with paper charts.”

