

Dermatology

Dermatology Associates of Eastern CT

Glastonbury, CT

Clinic profile

Providers: Five provider practice

Practice Specialty: Dermatology, cosmetic and medical necessity

AdvancedMD client since: 2005

The Practice

Dermatology Associates of Eastern CT is a high-volume, five provider practice handling medical necessity and cosmetic procedures. On average, their two physicians and two advanced practical registered nurses (APRN) see 100 to 120 patients a day. Overall, the practice estimates it has more than 30,000 patients in its system. "We couldn't do the volume we do in our office with our current staff if we didn't use the AdvancedMD billing service," said Patricia Zambrello, practice manager. "We would need two additional full-time employees to handle our insurance billing."

Zambrello estimates 70% of practice revenue comes from payer reimbursements and 30% is direct patient pay, noting the direct pay segment of the practice is growing faster. Direct pay procedures are a more valuable contributor to the practice's cash flow, she explained, because "we can collect for the procedure as the patient is checking out, which means nothing gets written off, and the practice sets the prices for the procedures it performs."

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Process Improvements Save Time and Improve Patient Relationships

Although a client of AdvancedMD Medical Billing Services (MBS) since 2005, it wasn't until early 2013 that Zambrello decided to change their process and adopt several practice automation features available on the AdvancedMD platform. The old, paper-based method of collecting all the charge slips, patient credit card slips and cash payment receipts used to take hours every day to balance, process and send off to the billing team in a FedEx pouch, recalls Zambrello. Now, her charges slips are transmitted electronically and her payments are processed through the AdvancedMD's integrated payment processing system, by the front desk staff.

Zambrello's MBS relationship manager recommended the practice move to the PayPros merchant card service, which is tightly integrated with the AdvancedMD billing platform. When they did, the practice realized several productivity gains. Today, the patient check-out person simply clicks a button within the patient record to bring up the credit card payment interface. The

patient card is swiped through a secure, encrypted Internet-connected device, the payment amount is typed into the payment screen and a submit button is clicked. Instantly, the co-pay amount is posted to the patient account. Since no patient card information is stored on an office computer, the card transaction is fully compliant with all credit card industry security and privacy requirements.

Zambrello gets a daily report from the credit card system, broken down by patient and payment type, and uses that report to complete her trial balance. "These new processes have saved me about two hours or more daily," she estimates, "freeing me up to focus more time on other needs of the practice."



Reducing patient no-shows

Another recent process improvement has to do with how the practice manages no-show appointments. At one point, Zambrello noticed that the costs of sending a patient to a collection agency for a small balance had gotten out of control. "We did a complete analysis of our patient collections process and noticed that our cost to collect a balance was higher than many of the balances to be collected," she said.

As a result, the practice changed its policy of charging a \$50 no-show fee. Instead, they moved to a new patient reminder process. "We noticed that most of the no-show problem was with new patients," added Zambrello. The problem was the long time lag between when the appointment was made and when the appointment took place. "We used to call our patients two days before their appointment.

Now, for new patients, about three weeks before their first appointment we send them a letter with new patient forms to fill out. Our no-shows dropped by about 90%. Instead of a no show, we now get a cancellation call because their medical need had gone away, enabling us to fill the spot." Plus, for the patient, their critical "first impression" with the practice significantly improved because their account is no longer sent to collections for a \$50 no-show fee.

How the Practice and Billing Teams Work Together

Zambrello's day typically starts with reviewing all the charge slips from the prior day's activities. "I come in the morning, balance all the monies then review each charge slip, verifying the CPT codes and looking for missing DX codes." Once the daily batch is reconciled to daily visits, she electronically scans each charge slip and uploads the charge slip batch to a shared storage system that is provided by AdvancedMD. "Typically, I finish all of these tasks by 11am in the morning. This new process is so much quicker and it is so much easier to track down answers when something doesn't balance," said Zambrello.

Before Zambrello adopted the practice of reviewing each charge slip for missing codes, she was getting 20 to 30 rejections back from the billing team per week. Now, by working in partnership with her billing team, she will go for weeks with no rejections or re-work. When there are issues, they number between one to three per week. This little process change, acknowledges Zambrello, "has saved me hours of time, because every time something comes back to our office from the billing team I have to manually pull the patient chart and track down the physician to review and recode the visit. It can really be time consuming when you have to track down a busy physician."

Zambrello has a three person front office team. One person is assigned to do check-in for the physicians, another is assigned to handle check-ins for the APRNs, and the

third manages checkout and direct patient payments. "All three are responsible for answering the phones and taking patient appointments. Our call volume is so high the current team can barely keep up." The Appointment Scheduler, included at no charge under the AdvancedMD Billing Services contract, helps ensure smooth communications and operation between the billing team and the practice. Not only is this feature used by the front office to schedule patient appointments, is used by the AdvancedMD system to generate a Missed Visit report. "The Appointment Scheduler has been extremely easy-to-learn for new employees and easy-to-use," commented Zambrello.

The Missed Visit report is another that keeps the two teams working in harmony. This report compares all patient visits that took place on a specific day against all charges submitted for that day. When a practice has a combination of insurance paid procedures and direct pay procedures, the Missed Visit is critical. "The billing team doesn't know whether a missed visit is a missing encounter slip or a direct pay procedure. I use the Missed Visit report to ensure I have coded all my direct pay charges as cosmetic in the billing system," explained Zambrello.

Which brings up another advantage of doing business on the shared AdvancedMD practice management platform: When both teams have access to the same set of practice management tools, the remote billing team is able to operate

as if they were just down the hall from the front office. For example, Zambrello is able to make entries into the same claims management system as the billing team is using. The billing team can see the Appointment Scheduler and the Missed Visit report and reconcile daily charges to insurance claims sent. This seamless sharing of the same application is possible because the AdvancedMD practice management system is a shared, cloud-computing application. Even their accountant has access to AdvancedMD software. "They use certain reports to prepare our Federal and State taxes," said Zambrello. "I use some of the standard reports to help me prepare our monthly state sales tax because the system keeps track of all our cosmetic payments."

In fact, Zambrello is a raving fan of many of the AdvancedMD reports. Among her favorite reports for managing the practice are Analysis of Services summary and Reimbursement Analysis detail. "The practice has a six month bonus plan, so the ability to run the reports by a specific time frame is very helpful. It seems like whatever question I have I can find the answer to it by pulling one of the standard reports. I just love the reporting system, and it's very user friendly."

Overall, Zambrello is very satisfied with the AdvancedMD billing service. "For the volume we generate, I like that they appreciate the business we bring to them, and that they are available to help us become better."



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