5 TECH TRENDS
Driving Family Practice Success
Index

Introduction ................................................................. 1

Shifting to the Cloud to Reduce Costs & Gain Convenience ................... 2

Switching to Integrated Practice Management & EHR Systems to Maximize Efficiency .................................................. 3

Growing Use of Patient Portals to Raise Productivity & Enhance Patient Care ......................................................... 4

Leveraging Mobile Solutions to Accomplish More On-The-Go ................... 5

Adopting Analytical Tools to Monitor Performance & Make Educated Decisions ......................................................... 5

Conclusion ........................................................................................................ 6
Family physicians play a pivotal role in the healthcare system, but it is becoming increasingly difficult for family practices to stay profitable. Mounting industry pressures like declining reimbursements, ICD-10, escalating costs, and rising administrative burdens are distracting physicians from patient care and causing widespread physician dissatisfaction. In fact, in Deloitte's 2013 Survey of U.S. Physicians, primary care providers emerged as the least satisfied with practicing medicine (41% dissatisfied).\(^1\)

As family physicians look for ways to gain footing, taking steps like adopting new technologies or replacing legacy systems are key to reducing administrative burdens and freeing up more time for patient care. In the following report, you’ll learn about five critical technologies that help family care physicians run their practices more efficiently, profitably, and enjoyably.

1 Shifting to The Cloud to Reduce Costs & Gain Convenience

The overhead of a typical family practice normally runs at about 60% of revenues, so it’s important to choose the most cost-effective healthcare IT solutions, such as practice management systems, electronic health records (EHR), and others. Cloud-based solutions are becoming increasingly popular due to their relative affordability, along with their heightened adaptability and accessibility.

With cloud-based solutions, family physicians gain three key benefits:

- Users can access the software with only a computer and Internet connection, so there are no expensive hardware purchases or yearly maintenance fees required. As a result, practices avoid the hefty up-front and long-term ownership costs typically associated with client-server systems.

- Cloud-based software delivers automatic updates that integrate seamlessly with the system, so practices avoid losing productivity during long downloads or trouble-shooting phone calls. In addition to being simple, cloud-based updates are also more affordable (and often free).

- Users can access the software 24/7, at home or on the go. They get work done where and when it works best for them, not just when they’re in the office.

Cloud-based technologies have the potential to reduce operating costs, while making family practices more prepared for change and more productive outside of the office.

Switching to Integrated Practice Management & EHR Systems to Maximize Efficiency

Family physicians bear some of the heaviest administrative burdens in the medical field—over half spend 10 or more hours on paperwork and administrative activities per week. As a result, it’s critical for them to maximize efficiency. While well-designed practice management and EHR systems generate efficiency gains by themselves, the benefits are magnified when these systems are integrated.

Here’s how:

• Physicians and staff avoid productivity losses from having to enter the same information (e.g., updated contact information) in two separate systems. Truly integrated systems link smoothly so data entered in one populates in the other. The result? Users complete their work more efficiently, leaving less room for error.

• An integrated system is often a more cost-effective choice, especially since it allows practices to avoid constructing an interface between separate systems.

• Practices have a single source for customer service. In addition to streamlining the initial service experience (e.g., implementation, training), there is no back-and-forth between vendors, allowing questions to get resolved more quickly.

Every minute that technology frees up for physicians is a minute they can reallocate to patient care or their own personal well-being. When physicians opt for an integrated system, they not only recover the time they’ve been losing, they also reduce stress levels through fewer system issues and a better service experience.


Over 50% of family physicians spend 10 or more hours on paperwork & administrative activities per week.
Growing Use of Patient Portals to Raise Productivity & Enhance Patient Care

When Affordable Care Act provisions bring an influx of 30 million newly insured individuals into the U.S. healthcare system next year, family physicians will be among the providers most affected. However, resource constraints will make it hard for many practices to take on new patients, despite their desire to do so. In fact, 48% of the primary care providers surveyed in the 2013 CareCloud/QuantiaMD Practice Profitability Index reported they lack the resources needed to take on ACA patients.\(^4\) In the struggle to do more with less, patient portals can be powerful aids for family practices to drive better outcomes and heighten efficiency. They are especially promising for family physicians due to the scope and duration of care that family physicians provide to their patients.

With patient portals, family practices gain key capabilities that lead to stronger patient engagement, including:

- Patients access their health records online, including lab results, so they can ask more informed questions and have tangible data to track as they work at improving their own health (e.g., vitals signs over time). Practices also cut down on phone calls related to lab results when patients view them online.

- Patients schedule appointments and submit prescription refill requests online, reducing the need for incoming calls to the practice. This “self-service” option eases a practice’s administrative burden and lets patients perform key health-related tasks in a more convenient, quick, and private way.

- Patients and doctors exchange messages securely online, allowing them to connect with ease. This strengthens the physician-patient relationship and reduces the hassle for both parties (e.g., phone calls, stacks of messages, interruptions).

Despite such benefits, these tools are still under-utilized: in a 2013 Deloitte survey, only 24% of physicians said their patients could schedule visits or access test results on the web and only 19% said patients could request prescription refills online.\(^5\) As industry changes stretch providers even thinner, patient engagement tools have the potential to drive both efficiency and outcomes by making patients proactive about their health.

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\(^4\)http://www.poweryourpractice.com/practice-profitability-index/
\(^5\)Deloitte 2013 Survey of U.S. Physicians
Leveraging Mobile Solutions to Accomplish More On-The-Go

The number of physicians working on tablet computers rises each year, recently reaching 72% (the iPad being the most popular), according to Manhattan Research. In addition to accessing EHRs and making notes on the go, physicians are using tablets for various other activities, including checking their schedules, sending email, and educating patients. Given that family physicians have such heavy patient loads—the majority see at least 15 patients per day—they are particularly poised to benefit from getting more work done in real-time rather than accumulating a pile of to-dos for the end of the day.

With mobile solutions, family practice physicians can gain key benefits like:

- Improved workflow: in a recent survey, 74% of healthcare providers said their tablet improved their workflow.
- Higher productivity: the same survey showed that healthcare professionals using tablets gained 1.2 hours per day. Relatedly, 86% reported that the tablet makes them better multi-taskers.
- Collaboration: 66% of providers said the tablet increases collaboration amongst colleagues.

Physicians have also found mobile technologies helpful for presenting images and animations to their patients, thus enhancing patient education. As the demands on family physicians’ time continue to grow, mobile technologies have the potential to play an important role in helping physicians improve both productivity and patient care.

Adopting Analytical Tools To Monitor Performance & Make Educated Decisions

“Business Analytics” can mean many different things, but in the context of physician practices, well-designed analytics tools can help physicians make data-driven decisions that improve practice performance. Armed with actionable insights, physicians can take appropriate actions to boost their efficiency and profitability. Given that roughly 1-in-5 family physicians belongs to an ACO, data access is even more critical for them, as they need to assess and report on their performance, while also identifying areas of improvement.

While the best systems provide data in a whole host of subjects, the three key areas are:

- **Billing**: robust solutions can answer an array of questions that help physicians benchmark results, identify issues, and track results over time. Possible questions include: How is my A/R trending? Have I collected more money so far this year versus last year? How effective is my practice at securing payment on first submission?

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8 http://www.amednews.com/article/20130107/business/130109995/5/
• **Operations:** systems that include operational data can help physicians ascertain where the practice is functioning well and where it’s falling short. Key questions might include: How quickly are my staff billing after patient visits? Which providers are seeing the most (and least) patients? Has my practice managed to reduce cancellations?

• **Clinical & Patient-Related:** these reports can include a variety of data about clinical trends and patient characteristics. Key questions might include: Which codes am I using the most? What do my patient demographics look like? What is the breakdown of preventive vs. sick visits for each provider in my practice?

When considering the need for data, physicians must bear in mind that data alone is not enough. Systems that deliver on their potential do more than house data; they make it easy to access specific data of interest and present it in visually appealing ways. The right tools make it simple for physicians to keep an ongoing pulse on their practice and consistently incorporate data into their decision-making.

**Conclusion**

While a vast array of exciting technologies exist, we narrowed this list down to those with the greatest potential to boost the efficiency and profitability of family practices, while raising family physicians’ overall satisfaction. Cloud-based technologies, integrated PM-EHR systems, patient portals, mobile technologies, and business analytics tools make a meaningful impact on family physicians’ work and lives—and truly deliver on the promise of technology.
CareCloud is a leading provider of web-based practice management, revenue cycle management, electronic health record (EHR), and medical billing software and services for medical groups. The company’s products are connecting providers to one another – and to their patients – through a fully integrated digital healthcare ecosystem that can be accessed on any browser or device.

CareCloud is helping thousands of physicians to increase collections, streamline operations and improve patient care in 45 states. The company was named a winner of IBM’s SmartCamp Silicon Valley 2010 for its innovative technology and has raised $44 million in VC funding from Intel Capital, Norwest Venture Partners, and Tenaya Capital. To learn more about CareCloud, please visit www.carecloud.com.

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