

Michigan Cornea Consultants significantly reduces costs and improves responsiveness

Challenge

- Replace an inefficient process and eliminate \$35,000 in annual transcription expenses

Solution

- Use Dragon Medical Practice Edition speech recognition to create complete, real-time patient notes and consult letters quickly

Results

- Created high quality documentation unique to each patient encounter
- Significant annual cost savings included \$35,000 in transcription costs
- Macros and templates reduced the time it takes to enter patient information

Summary

Michigan Cornea Consultants is a sub-specialist practice focused on treating corneal and external diseases involving the external eye, cornea, iris and lens. Most patients are referred by an ophthalmologist or optometrist, though on occasion patients may be seen at the request of internists, dermatologists or rheumatologists. Three full-time physicians serve patients at offices in Southfield, Warren, and Dearborn, Michigan.

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Dr. Steven P. Dunn, MD

The practice has deployed real-time speech recognition to improve clinical workflow. Cost savings and dramatically higher levels of service to patients and responsiveness to referring physicians are among the benefits Michigan Cornea Consultants have seen. Recently, all three physicians in the practice upgraded to Dragon® Medical Practice Edition.

High transcription costs, slow turnaround

Prior to implementing Dragon Medical, Michigan Cornea Consultants used hand-held recorders and a transcription service to complete letters to referring physicians. This method of producing letters cost the practice more than \$35,000 each year in labor expense. The turnaround time was also unacceptably slow. Physicians had to wait one to two days to receive their notes back from the transcription service before they could review and sign off on them. Steven P. Dunn, MD recalled, “We needed quicker turnaround time.”

The solution: Speech recognition technology

One of the three physician partners, Dr. Christopher Chow, began using Dragon Medical in 2003 to eliminate transcription costs and speed turnaround of his referral notes. Dr. Chow was so pleased with the solution that the other partners soon adopted Dragon Medical as well. The practice has been using this solution ever since, recently upgrading to the latest version, Dragon Medical Practice Edition.

The implementation

An authorized Value-Added Dragon Medical Reseller assisted the practice with the implementation and use of their Dragon Medical software right from the start. He set up the hardware (e.g., microphones and computers) and installed the Dragon Medical software, giving the physicians the capability of dictating directly into Microsoft® Word and the option of using a digital recorder and then later transcribing their dictation.

The reseller created Microsoft Word® templates for various types of exams and procedures that the physicians perform regularly. These included consultations and progress reports to referring physicians, as well as letters to insurance companies and procedural notes. He also created speech macros to simplify the entry of data into these templates. For example, when completing a consult letter designed to communicate to the referring physician, the doctors can state the referring physician’s name and custom programming automatically supplies

the correct address from Microsoft Outlook®. “The reseller we worked with coordinated our entire setup,” said Dr. Dunn, “he oversaw the entire implementation in our office and made it very smooth for us.”

Getting up to speed

Additionally, the reseller trained the physicians in the use of Dragon Medical and continues to provide ongoing support. As Dr. Dunn recalls, “We read scripts to train Dragon Medical to recognize our voices. This process also taught us to enunciate for better recognition. Because of this training, we were very skillful with the product after just a few weeks.”

The practice was uncertain initially about how well speech recognition would work for them, but use of the system has turned out to be a very positive experience. “When we started looking at speech recognition systems, we got a mixture of positive and negative reports,” Dr. Dunn says. “I really didn’t know how this would work out for us. But Dragon Medical has exceeded our expectations. It’s a pleasure to use.”

Reducing costs

Since all three partners have been using Dragon Medical, the practice has eliminated the ongoing labor and technology costs of a transcription service. This approach has saved the practice roughly \$35,000 per year, an ongoing financial benefit.

Speeding data entry

Another tremendous benefit has been the physician time savings Dragon Medical Practice Edition has delivered as it helps them complete their notes. Dr. Dunn uses 15 templates along with associated macros to speed the process of entering information. For example, one template contains a large amount of standard text and patient-specific numbers. Dr. Dunn simply says “next” to get to the point where he can enter the next set of numbers without the need to dictate the intervening text. He only needs to dictate the 25% of free-form text that represents his assessment. “This process really speeds things along,” Dr. Dunn says.

Overall, the use of templates and macros with Dragon Medical Practice Edition has cut the time it takes to dictate letters to referring physicians in half. “On average, I used to complete four to five letters per hour. Now it takes about five to seven minutes for me to create each consultation report,” says Dr. Dunn.

“Because of the instant turnaround time, I can send a letter back to the referring physician as soon as I finish the exam. Referring physicians are very impressed. As consultants, we’re in a service industry. And providing information that will either answer the referring physician’s question or help with a patient’s continued care has a beneficial effect in terms of physicians’ willingness to send additional patients in the future.”

Dr. Steven P. Dunn, MD

Improving work-life balance

Because completing the initial consultation and follow-up reports is so much faster, the partners have improved their work-life balance. As Dr. Dunn explained, “because I can get more done at the office, I don’t have to drag charts home.”

Fast turnaround impresses referring physicians

Turnaround time is also quicker. Instead of having to wait one to two days for the transcription service to return the letters and reports, Dragon Medical Practice Edition allows physicians to create the letters and reports instantly for immediate review.

“Because of the instant turnaround time,” says Dr. Dunn, “I can send a letter back to the referring physician as soon as I finish the exam. Referring physicians are very impressed. As consultants, we’re in a service industry. And providing information that will either answer the referring physician’s question or help with a patient’s continued care has a beneficial effect in terms of physicians’ willingness to send additional patients in the future.”

Better patient service

Patients also need consult letters from time to time for claims and benefits purposes, and Dragon Medical Practice Edition helps with that as well. As Dr. Dunn explains, “We don’t always know if patients need letters in advance. With Dragon Medical Practice Edition, we can dictate the letter on the spot and give it to the patient right then and there. It’s allowed us to improve patient satisfaction.”

Enhancing access to patient information

Another benefit of using Dragon Medical Practice Edition to create letters is that the physician can use the stored documents as a de facto electronic medical record. “Although we don’t have an EMR, because I store all the letters I write using Dragon Medical Practice Edition on my hard drive, if someone calls, I can easily go to my computer and pull up the letter,” says Dr. Dunn. “I can get my hands on information about any major issues with

a patient while the front office is looking for the chart. It’s like having an extensive medical record at my fingertips.”

A high degree of satisfaction

Michigan Cornea Consultants has been very satisfied with Dragon Medical Practice Edition. “It’s a great, highly flexible product and I enjoy using it,” said Dr. Dunn. “We’re very dependent on it in a positive way to get our dictation done. It does a nice job.”

The practice has already recommended the product to other practices. “We’ve talked to other practices and encouraged them to look at it seriously,” said Dunn.

Highlights

- All three physicians in the practice currently use Dragon Medical Practice Edition
- \$35,000 in ongoing, annual transcription expenses have been eliminated
- Templates and macros within Dragon Medical Practice Edition allow the physicians to cut the time it takes to send out letters and reports to other physicians in half
- Faster creation of letters and reports improves work-life balance
- Referring physicians are extremely pleased that they receive notes immediately from Michigan Cornea Consultants
- Ready retrieval of referral letters stored on the physician’s desktop computer improves access to patient information
- Physician satisfaction at Michigan Cornea Consultants has improved through the use of Dragon Medical

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