

Cost savings and a healthy work-life balance at Waterloo Medical Group

Nuance Dragon Medical relieves the pressure across the whole team, speeds up clinical document turnaround times and delivers savings of £15000 within 12 months.

Challenge

- Rising patient numbers
- Need to strike a healthier work-life balance for its team
- Need to reduce administration cost

Solution

- Dragon Medical
- Training and Support from Nuance Healthcare Connections Partner - VoicePower

Results

- Savings of up to £15,000 within 12 months
- Reduced stress across the whole team
- Faster turnaround times and higher quality clinical documentation

Of the many conundrums faced by General Practices across the country, the need for doctors and administration staff to strike a healthy work-life balance, against a backdrop of rising patient numbers, can often prove complex to resolve. One Practice that can state it has succeeded in addressing this challenge is Waterloo Medical Group located in the north east of England and comprising two sites. Following the deployment of Dragon Medical – the desktop speech recognition solution from Nuance Communications which features a specific medical vocabulary – it has been able to ease several of the pressure points shared by many doctors, while also making cost savings of approximately £15,000 within 12 months and improving the turnaround times for clinical documentation.

More patients, more pressure

Founded over 30 years ago to serve citizens near the Port of Blyth, the practice has seen its patient numbers increase steadily from 13,700 to 14,300. The decline of the area's core industries – which ranged from shipbuilding to fishing - has affected its citizens, driving long-term health issues which have placed further demand on the practice's team of nine doctors and four secretaries across two sites.

"From our doctors to our secretaries, we needed to be more efficient in order to cope with the rising patient numbers and the extra pressure on the team here" explained Practice Manager Chris Watson.

A particular problem he outlined related to secretarial cover. "With a team of four secretaries, referral letters could be turned around in 72hrs. However, in the event of secretarial sick leave or over the holiday period, productivity could plummet such that turnaround time of letters could take up to nine days. This situation was not acceptable and we had to address it; but in a cost effective way." Chris and his team dismissed the typical options – to outsource transcription or to hire-in agency staff - when support was needed. "Staffing costs are our biggest overheads, and both of these options were too expensive" Chris stated.

Demonstrating the future way of working

A meeting with Nuance Communication's authorised Healthcare Connections partner, VoicePower Ltd, led to an introduction to Dragon Medical. "VoicePower was excellent. It delivered a presentation explaining the benefits of speech recognition, then the team took the time to listen to our challenges,

A solution to healthcare challenges using the power of speech

The alternative option – speech recognition - was one that some members of the team were familiar with and that others were keen to try, as Chris explained: "A few of the doctors suggested looking at speech recognition. Some of them had tried the technology many years ago and we thought it was time that we looked at it again to see how it had progressed and whether it could help us achieve our goals."

Helping medical professionals to achieve their goals is something that Dragon Medical has been achieving for many years. Offering high accuracy rates out-of-the-box and capable of capturing the patient story three times faster using voice than by typing, Dragon Medical dramatically reduces the time clinicians spend documenting care – 30-60 minutes or more per day, according to a number of studies.

our experiences with speech recognition to date and the efficiency objectives we had in mind." He added: "During the demonstration, we were stunned by Dragon Medical's speed and accuracy and its ability to cope effortlessly with the range of broad accents we have at the practice."

"Thanks to VoicePower's excellent training and ongoing support, we were using Dragon Medical within an hour. So, very little time investment was needed to make the move to speech recognition. It was done without any disruption to patient services."

Day to day, Dragon Medical has impressed Chris and his team with its ease of use and accuracy: “The speed and accuracy is superb. It has helped us reduce our turnaround times considerably. It also comes into its own when writing long or detailed reports. It used to take over 30 minutes to complete a three or four page report. Thanks to Dragon Medical, that’s down to less than 10 minutes per report. Dragon Medical is equally useful for essential practice admin tasks such as quickly documenting meeting minutes.”

Thanks to Dragon Medical’s vocabulary – which covers over 60 medical specialties and subspecialties in healthcare – the team at Waterloo can be assured of its accuracy, and they have come to trust it. “We had one secretarial cover come in who claimed to have medical experience. She couldn’t actually understand any of the medical terminology used by the GPs. We don’t have this problem – or expense - with Dragon Medical,” Chris added.

With the efficiency gains Dragon Medical has delivered, Chris says the workload on the team now using it have been reduced to the point that he’s not had to worry about cover in the event of secretarial sickness or leave. “Because Dragon Medical is so efficient, we can hold our own in the event of staff absence. I know it can scale easily if we’re a team member down. Because of that, we’ve saved approximately £15,000 by not having to outsource work or hire-in cover. That’s a fantastic return on investment (ROI) and we can share those savings with our team. At a time of pay-freezes across practices, thanks to Dragon Medical we’re in a position to offer our staff a pay-rise and get our staffing costs under control.”

Savings across the board

The greatest saving realised by using Dragon Medical isn’t necessarily financial, as Chris explains: “Dragon Medical helps ease the pressure on GPs.” He supports this point by explaining that “...the doctors receive a lot of letters each day and about 15% of them require a response. We now have a process in place whereby the secretaries review the incoming mail to determine whether they need to be seen by the doctor or not. Those letters that need replying to can be responded to quickly using Dragon Medical, which saves doctor’s time and takes away a lot of pressure.”

“Thanks to Dragon Medical we reduced the time for a 3-4 page report to 10 minutes!”

“We’ve saved approximately £15,000 by not having to outsource work or hire-in cover”

Dragon Medical – attractive to current staff and new recruits

Chris also believes Dragon Medical is a powerful recruitment tool. “General Practices are stressful environments because of the workload. While the GPs accept that situation, unsurprisingly, many still want to find a good work-life balance. We believe we can offer them that because we have adopted speech

recognition, and we make a point of explaining that we’re a progressive, forward thinking practice that’s embraced the technology as a way of better controlling workloads.”

For a relatively small investment, Chris is adamant that Dragon Medical has had a positive impact at the practice.

“Stress levels have been reduced, we’ve made excellent cost savings, we’re better able to cope with rising patient numbers, letter turnaround times are down, and, more than anything, our medical documentation is more complete and accurate than before.”



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