


FAMILY PRACTICE CENTRE

Vancouver, British Columbia

The Family Practice Centre (FPC), located in Vancouver on the grounds of BC Women's Hospital and Health Centre, consists of a team of health professionals who work together to deliver full service primary health care while helping to train tomorrow's family physicians.

FPC is part of the BC government's Primary Health Care Organization (PHCO), which offers the opportunity for doctors, nurses and allied health care providers to explore new and innovative ways to deliver quality health care.

"We scan all incoming paper documents, linking them with a mouse-click to the appropriate patient record. Paper documents are kept for a few days then confidentially shredded, keeping paper storage to a minimum. We generate prescriptions during the patient visit."

John Mail, MD

FPC subscribes to a collaborative and team-based approach to patient care, one that's supported not just by staff but reinforced by their commitment to electronic medical record (EMR) technology and their physician reimbursement model. They receive an annual funding payment for each patient registered to the Centre; this unique physician remuneration method, known as "rostering" or "population-based funding," requires different billing capabilities, and places increased importance on the availability and accessibility of patient records both through indirect and direct patient encounters. Doctors and staff at FPC regularly interact with patients and pharmacies over the phone to answer questions and refill prescriptions, for examples, while still receiving payment for their services, a level of service not typically supported by fee-for-service remuneration schemes.

EMR at Family Practice Centre

In November 1999, FPC obtained funding through PHCO for a trial pilot program for EMR software. FPC selected and implemented an EMR vendor through this program; however, within 18 months they abandoned the original system and made the switch to Wolf Medical Suite. When asked why they replaced the previous solution, Dr. Mail, a family physician with FPC explained: "Wolf was much more intuitive and easy to use, and they had experience with the unique funding program with which we were involved."

Because FPC subscribes to the "rostering" method of payment, other members of the FPC healthcare team, such as the dietician, nurse practitioner, and other physicians can be more involved in patient care without the burden of worrying about how to bill for discrete patient encounters; this contributes to the delivery of team-based medical services at FPC. As a result of this, the accessibility, availability and legibility of patient records are even more critical.

Dr. Mail paints a picture of practice before automation: "In the past, physicians created paper charts. On the left side of the chart was a scrawled problem list and a messy allergy record, often not updated. On the right side were notes that sometimes were illegible and chaotic, preceded by a date stamp. These notes, together with notes scribbled in the margins of patient encounter sheets, had to be deciphered and interpreted by MOAs or other doctors, an error-prone exercise depending upon the completeness of the notes and legibility. Lab results were typewritten, and could not be searched or displayed graphically. Documents from other physicians and consultants were often filed at the back of the chart, and it was a struggle to find and read them. Then, charts had to be filed."

"On top of that, the office receives between 25 and 100 paper documents a day per physician, including referral letters, patient consult letters, and lab results that had to be manually filed. This was a very labor-intensive and error-prone process. Now we scan all incoming paper documents, linking them with a mouse-click to the appropriate patient record. Paper documents are kept for a few days then confidentially shredded, keeping paper storage to a minimum. We generate prescriptions during the patient visit."

When asked what patients think of the system, Dr. Mail replied, "They love that we can find their chart and that we can quickly search for and find their lab results. Because lab results are automatically downloaded from the lab, results are available right in the patient record





"It's always a challenge getting the phones answered in a timely way. Now MOAs spend less time filing and more time doing telephone work and interacting directly with patients."

John Mail, MD

"There's no need for a well patient with a chronic condition to come in every month just to renew a prescription."

John Mail, MD

much sooner than they used to be. Also – and this is probably more a function of how we are paid – we are able to have patient visits that address more than one condition or concern." He added, "For me, if a patient has well-controlled blood pressure, we can review lab results over the phone and simply renew regular medications. There's no need for a well patient with a chronic condition to come in every month just to renew a prescription."

Dr. Mail finds the availability of SOAP templates is another very strong feature of Wolf. Standard templates guide the physician through patient encounters and save physicians time as they only need to fill in specific information related to the subject of the visit.

Dr. Mail also pointed to the ability to graph lab results as a key feature of Wolf. For example, for an anemic patient, Dr. Mail can easily view hemoglobin levels over time against the iron they are taking, and show patients the correlation between medication and treatment outcomes. "This is a great tool for me, and many patients really like to see their information displayed in this simple way."

FPC is a busy office, with 6 general practitioners, 5 MOAs, an office manager, a dietician, nurse practitioner, and occasionally locums. It's also a teaching facility, with residents from UBC rotating through on 16-week cycles throughout the year. They all access the EMR system regularly. "It's always a challenge getting the phones answered in a timely way. Now MOAs spend less time filing and more time doing telephone work and interacting directly with patients."

Top Benefits for Family Practice Centre

- provides an easy-to-use system for more than 15 regular and numerous temporary EMR users, including locums and residents
- automates billing for family practice that subscribes to population-based physician remuneration scheme ("rostering")
- automates scheduling; allows physicians to manage and view their own schedules, if desired, from the office or remotely
- facilitates a collaborative approach to family practice that supports team-based care and provides for indirect patient encounters via telephone and email, in addition to face-to-face patient encounters
- frees time for staff to spend with patients and on the phone
- reduces filing errors and complications due incomplete or illegible charts
- increases patient satisfaction with access to complete records and graphical charts that display electronic labs and medications
- contributes to a more efficient and organized practice

