EHR Implementation Helps Small-Town Pediatrics Practice Through
18% Surge in New Patients Over 4 Months …
With No Overtime, No New Staff, and AR Slashed by 58%

Nine months ago, the two physicians, three NPs, and eight other employees at Care4Kids were barely keeping the pace needed to care for the practice's 3,800 patients.

Then they learned two news businesses were coming to their small town of Dundee, Michigan. The businesses expected to create 975 jobs. New jobs meant new families would be moving to the area. Care4Kids expected to get as many as 265 new patients, and didn't see how they could take care of them. They identified inefficient workflows as the primary barrier to growth, and their aging IT systems were the root cause.

Sohail James is the Practice Manager at Care4Kids. He describes those medical record and revenue cycle systems as "a digital archipelago."

> *"We had a Windows-based scheduling system and a 14-year-old billing system. Our medical records were stored in Excel spread-sheets and a Microsoft Access database. None of these systems interacted with the others, so we were constantly retyping patient data. It was frustrating. We knew about the technology out there, but there was never a good time to make the leap."*
> - Sohail James, Care4Kids Practice Manager

But the aging and inefficient software systems were only part of the problem. "Meaningful Use needed our attention, but we just couldn't focus on it," Sohail said. "And we were nervous about ICD-10. And of course we had the security risk of storing PHI in our building. Huge challenges, and we couldn't decide which one to tackle first."

Customer
Care4Kids is a Pediatrics practice in Dundee, Michigan.

Challenge
In a four-month span, two new businesses brought 975 new jobs to Dundee. As a result, the practice's patient population jumped by 18%, threatening to bury staff under their patchwork systems, databases, and spreadsheets.

Solution
Care4Kids purchased Cloud9, a SaaS EHR system with 9 modules that cover scheduling, charting, ePrescribing, ordering, referrals, transcribing, billing, Meaningful Use, and a Patient Portal.

Results
Care4Kids absorbed the 18% increase in patients without new staff or overtime. AR is down 58%, and patient satisfaction is up 16%.

New patients … old systems … inefficient workflows … regulatory changes … compliance risks. Care4Kids knew it was time to replace their software and databases.

But they didn't want to buy a new computer system, because they'd need to buy new hardware and hire new staff to support it. So they focused on Software as a Service (SaaS) systems. After a 5-week search, they found all the functionality they needed in a cloud-based integrated EHR called Cloud9.

Ready or Not, Here They Come
Seven months ago, before the new EHR was in place, a new factory opened just outside of Dundee. Care4Kids noticed a spike in new appointments from the families of the factory's 500 new employees.

Four months ago, the Cloud9 EHR implementation, data conversion, and staff training were complete. And not a moment too soon. Appointments were increasing again because a new "destination store" opened in Dundee, bringing 475 more jobs to the area.

Connie Slaunwhite, MD, is the Physician Lead at Care4Kids. She remembers it well. "We expected maybe 265 new patients. We have 680! We used to see 40 to 50 patients every day. Now we see 45 to 60."

"I'd say we were fortunate. Very fortunate. We knew we'd be getting a lot of new patients in a short time frame. We tried to estimate the increase, but we were way off. We thought we'd see a 7% bump, but we saw an 18% jump. There's no way we could have absorbed the extra volume with our previous systems. We're just glad we saw it coming and were ready with our new EHR system when we were. Otherwise, we would have had to turn away new patients." - Connie Slaunwhite, MD, Care4Kids

Immediate ROI

Care4Kids discovered several benefits of their new integrated EHR system right away. AR dropped from $19,000 to $8,000 and collections went up 6% per visit. "We have the same mix of patients as before," said Sohail, "but we have better claims processes now. Fewer rejections … maximum fees."

And there were quick wins with ICD-10 and Meaningful Use, which are fully supported by Cloud9. "We hadn't yet tackled Meaningful Use," Sohail said. "But with very little training, we were able to integrate MU measures into our practice and attest to Stage 1. Cashing that first incentive check was an exciting moment."

Protecting ePHI got a lot easier, too. It's stored off-site on HIPAA-compliant Cloud9 servers. Sohail is relieved. "It's a big deal to not have patient data sitting here on our computers. Now we don't worry about being on the news because someone broke in and stole our patient data. We definitely sleep better."

A Pleasant Surprise

And then there were the unexpected benefits – a pleasant surprise.

Dr. Slaunwhite observed new efficiencies from system integration and mobile access. "We bill much faster than we used to, because we have automation and also don't have to retype data into a separate system. And mobile access is so helpful. If I'm at home and one of the NPs wants me for a consult, I just log in to the Cloud9 app on my smartphone and I'm reviewing the patient's medical record in 60 seconds. I couldn't even imagine doing that a year ago."

Their favorite benefit? "It has to be the patient portal," Dr. Slaunwhite said. "I've had dozens of parents say how much they like the patient portal. Keep in mind, we deal mostly with parents in their 20s, 30s, and 40s. They're familiar with this technology. They want to do things by themselves. They're thrilled they can manage appointments and view their children's medical records, lab results, and imaged documents – all from their home computer or smartphone. And they document their own family health history, which means we don't need to take time during a visit to collect it. We 're more efficient, and patients are more satisfied."

It's Gone!

Two months after the switch to Cloud9, Sohail realized something was missing. He'd been so busy getting to know the system, he didn't notice at first. Then one day, it hit him. "Downtime. We've had zero downtime. We've come to think of Cloud9 like electricity. It's always on for us."

Dr. Slaunwhite noticed something else was gone: the chronic low-level hum of fear that some piece of their fragile system would fail horribly. "We talked among ourselves about the many risks we had, and it created a nagging stress. But it's gone now. We all have confidence and … peace. Hard to describe. We're seeing more patients, but the thing is, we didn't hire any new staff, and nobody has to work extra hours. We're simply more productive. Forgive the pun, but I have to say it: Cloud9 put us on Cloud 9."

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