

# How to Leverage New Technologies to Achieve Better Balance

Technology to date may not have streamlined patient care and practice management as expected, but emerging solutions are paving the way for greater efficiency, accuracy and ease-of-use.

BY KATHY CLAYTOR

>> The average healthcare provider must complete numerous, often conflicting tasks during the day, which can quickly swallow time during patient encounters. Although providing quality care tops physicians' priority lists, time with patients can sometimes get derailed due to other tasks like clinical documentation, quality reporting, and managing business functions. Dermatologists, in particular, have a lot to juggle, because they experience higher patient volumes than other providers, shrinking the time per patient to an estimated average of 9 to 12 minutes. This does not afford much room for inefficiencies and inadequacies, and the resulting pressures can lead to frustration and burnout.

Unfortunately, many technology solutions initially aimed at streamlining clinical and operational tasks have fallen short. In some cases, they have even added complications, distracting providers from patients as they toggle between screens and search for relevant information.

On the bright side, innovations are changing these dynamics, freeing physician and staff time. By leveraging these technologies, practices can realize greater clinical and operational efficiencies and create a more balanced work environment. Not only does this improve morale, but it also enhances patient satisfaction, supports stronger reporting, and enables higher quality care.

## THREE FEATURES TO WATCH

What is it about these new technologies that differentiates them from what's come before? Here are three key features that set these solutions apart.

**Integration between clinical and operational systems.** Traditionally, a practice's electronic medical record (EMR), practice management (PM), and revenue cycle systems have functioned in siloes, which has often yielded information duplication, rework, and missed opportunities to improve performance. However, since integrated systems offer seamless connections between the various solutions, providers can more efficiently manage patient demographics, insurance information, clinical data, and billing details. For example, in an integrated system, when a physician makes a change in the EMR, it is automatically reflected in the financial and scheduling programs, facilitating smoother billing, follow-up appointment scheduling, and post-visit communication. After the patient visit, practices can quickly complete and electronically submit claims to insurers without having to key in clinical details, which can result in fewer claims

Despite potential utility, technology has not always proven beneficial in practice and has resulted in lost efficiency and suboptimal interactions with patients. However, technology evolutions continue to show promise. Features such as integration between clinical and operational systems, customized clinical content that meets specialty practice needs, and increased flexibility through the cloud all warrant consideration.

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errors and greater time savings for staff. Practices also can increase patient retention by running reports to determine which patients are due for services, prompting them to make appointments. Providers can even set up and manage incentives where appropriate.

**Customized clinical content that meets specialty practice needs.** Part of physicians' frustration with EMRs has been their one-size-fits-all design. Because a standard EMR doesn't typically include a large volume of specialty content, providers like dermatologists can spend considerable time hunting for information or manually entering it, which can slow them down and take away from patient care. By using a system that is designed specifically for dermatologists, physicians can optimize the patient visit. They are customizable to match practice workflow, offering adaptable templates that can meet the unique needs of multiple providers. The customizations speed clinical documentation while preserving specificity, let physicians easily draft and renew prescriptions with a few clicks, offer essential patient information on one screen, and facilitate image management. Providers can import images directly from a digital camera or iPad—as well as easily compare pre-operative and post-operative views. Advanced search technology helps physicians rapidly obtain images by procedure, appointment date, category, or other custom tag.

**Increased flexibility through the cloud.** When integrated systems are located in the cloud rather than on a server, they enable greater mobility, allowing physicians to access patient and practice information from anywhere—even their mobile devices and tablets. Providers can easily move

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between practice locations or between home and office, retrieving patient records, scheduling systems and practice management tools on the go. This helps physicians better manage their time while realizing balance, which ultimately lessens burnout and frustration.

Cloud technology is also beneficial from a cost standpoint, as these solutions carry lower upfront costs than on-premise servers and alleviate expenses associated with server maintenance, failure, natural disaster, or cyberattack. With a cloud-based system, the vendor makes updates to the solution and funnels them through the cloud. As such, providers always have access to the latest version of the technology, allowing them to leverage new and emerging functionalities faster and without having to have a dedicated team onsite.

## Burnout By the Numbers

**43.9%** Percentage of US physicians who reported at least one symptom of burnout in 2017.

Findings from the triennial study of physician burnout by researchers from the American Medical Association (AMA), the Mayo Clinic, and Stanford University School (and appearing in *Mayo Clinic Proceedings*) show that the burnout rate among physicians in the US has dropped modestly in 2017 from its peak in 2014. Current burnout rates are in line with 2011 levels.

While more than 40 percent of US physicians exhibited at least one symptom of burnout in 2017, this compares to 54.4 percent in 2014 and 45.5 percent in 2011. In comparison, the overall prevalence of burnout among US workers was 28.1 percent in 2017, similar to levels found in 2014 (28.4 percent) and 2011 (28.6 percent).

### LOOK TO MATURE TECHNOLOGIES

Although technology to date may not have streamlined patient care and practice management as expected, the latest solutions are paving the way for greater efficiency, accuracy and ease-of-use. By embracing these new features, dermatology practices can start to alleviate many of burdens placed on their physicians and administrative staff, fostering a more balanced workplace and freeing time to focus on patients. ■

*Kathy Claytor is a Product Owner in Nextech's Product Management department focusing on iPad, eRx, EMR, and Regulatory Reporting. Having been with the company more than 14 years, Kathy brings a wealth of knowledge to the table and is responsible for collaborating with clients and software engineers to help write the future of Nextech's products.*