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## **Optimal Health Physicians** **Specializes in Integrative Internal Medicine** **Rockville, Maryland**

Imagine this scenario: A twelve year old integrative internal medicine practice that is staffed by two M.D.'s and a D.O. decides to implement its first electronic medical record system. But instead of the typical reasons that a medical practice chooses an EMR, the major differentiator that will ultimately end their intensive search is the capability to create an accessible database for the analysis of the treatment, therapies and care of patients.

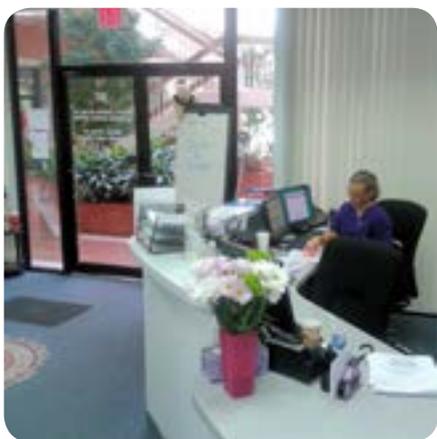
Optimal Health Physicians, a Rockville, Maryland based integrative internal medicine practice turned this scenario into reality. So how did OHP accomplish its very purposeful mission? Enter Waiting Room Solutions.



“Optimal Health Physicians had some scheduling software, but it was useless. Waiting Room Solutions is our practice’s first EMR. We selected WRS in order to create an accessible database for the analysis of the treatment, therapies and care of patients. We were looking for an EMR software system that would allow us to actually gather data about our patient care,” said John Davidson, Optimal Health Physicians’ director of operations and business development.

Noting that he has been interested in gathering data throughout the 40 years that he has been in the healthcare field, Davidson said, “I want to know every single thing that happens to a patient over time. Almost all of the EMR systems that I’ve dealt with--from huge ones in major health

systems to the mom and pop shops-- are designed to gather information for the purpose of coding and reimbursement. This practice doesn't participate in any health insurance or Medicare. Patients pay us and we give them the documents that they can submit to their insurance companies to get reimbursed. We took ourselves out of the middle. In fact, we put ourselves next to the patients, rather than next to the insurance companies."



## Getting To Know You

In his search for an EMR software system, Davidson often used the term 'longitudinal patient specific data' in his close discussions with at least a dozen EMR software firms. "This term means, what was really done to the patient--what was really wrong with them. With Waiting Room Solutions patient portal, our patients can put in information about themselves. The reason that I selected WRS was because we can go in the direction of having a much, much closer patient relationship through the patient portal. We can send patients requests to log in and

fill out questionnaires, pushing them to provide us with information about how they are doing between their visits. We call it richer, more detailed patient information. I use the term longitudinal to mean, ongoing and over time," stated Davidson.

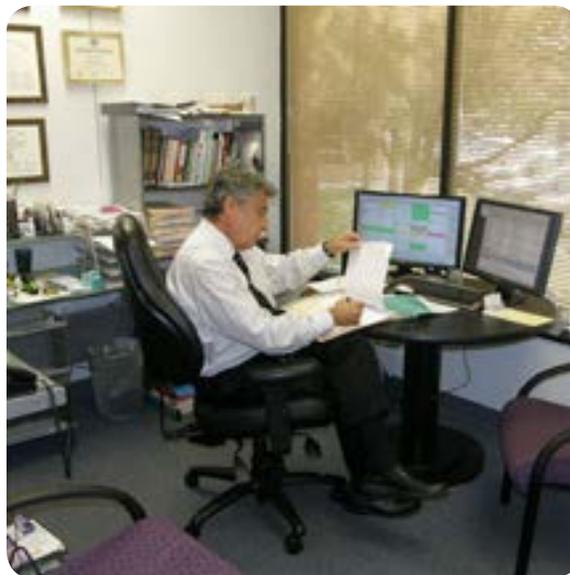
Emphasizing that Optimal Health Physicians' patients are mainly culled from word of mouth, Davidson said that most of the patients are suffering from chronic infections such as Lyme disease. According to Davidson, these patients have usually been seen by several other physicians and were not diagnosed properly. When Optimal Health Physicians starts doing lab testing and analysis they find out that very often their patients have chronic infections from tick bites.

"They have been fighting these infections for years. We have kids who go downhill in six months after camping and we get them on a good solid regimen and they can think again and go back to school and play the guitar and piano and do whatever else they had been doing. They hired me to try to beat the system into a structure that would give us information so that we can publish things so that we can provide other information to other physicians about these illnesses," said Davidson.

***"WRS articulated to me that I will be able to get a 100% download of database files for every single element in the system. If I have other software I can look at that data and say, 'What are the patterns'? What are the patterns that are in the data that I don't even know to look for?"***

## Show and Tell

Optimal Health Physicians' seriousness about sharing information with other physicians in its quest to improve patient care is evidenced by Davidson's enthusiasm when he talks about his plans to develop templates using Waiting Room Solutions. "We talked to WRS about how once we develop templates and questionnaires and the elements that are gathered in the interview in the patient visit we can then copy and distribute those kinds of templates to other physicians who want to treat these kinds of patients. We can suggest these physicians get WRS. We'd like any way that we can to create a network of physicians who are all focused on the things that I'm talking about and who are all using the same form which we can pool the data from. We'd be gathering similar data that would then be analyzed on a larger scale. You'd have five or ten medical practices all with the same philosophy trying to learn from what they do," asserted Davidson.



Emphasizing that doctors don't have a lot of time to go through paper charts to write papers, Davidson said, "They need a database. WRS articulated to me that I will be able to get a 100% download of database files for every single element in the system. If I have other software I can look at that data and say, 'What are the patterns'? What are the patterns that are in the data that I don't even know to look for? With the very sophisticated software that comes out of the intelligence community you can look at data and see if there are patterns in the numbers. Suddenly you start to see there are patterns in patients who showed up with 'this', who had this test and had this medicine and who came back six weeks later. Suddenly you can find the patterns and pathways in the patient population that you are caring for," explained Davidson.

Claiming that President Obama and his advisers share his view that EMR systems are valuable in being able to tell physicians what's wrong with people, how to take care of them and how to reach out to patients to make sure they are taking their medicines, Davidson said, "I'm convinced that we can cut the national healthcare budget in half. The problem is that very few Electronic Medical Record systems allow you to get out the data because they aren't designed for that. WRS will allow me to export all of my data from their servers. I don't want WRS to write a report for me. It's not too difficult to configure the templates and the sequence of events and add all of your own descriptions of what you do during a physical," he said.

# WRS CLIENT CASE STUDIES

Davidson stressed the importance to him of gathering data to generate knowledge that can help patients by providing the example of a patient who has a headache. Optimal Health Physicians will be able to go into WRS and instead of checking off a box that says 'yes' or 'no' there will be ten descriptions of a headache, including what type of headache; a headache that comes and goes; a headache that occurs only a certain time of day; etc. Similarly, if a patient has joint pain, the physician will want to know which joints; how long they have had joint pain; what kind of pain; a burning pain; a shooting pain, etc.

“That information is not in any EMR systems. Waiting Room Solutions allows us to put that information into the system. Because we can put that information in we can get it back out. Because we can put it in we can then query the system later when we get our data out as to how many of our patients describe their pain not just as joint pain, but as shooting pain or burning in their joints. It's a totally different infection that causes different symptoms. We're looking at patients who have symptoms of everything you can think of, so it's the pattern of their symptoms and their personal medical history, their presentation and some lab testing that allows our physicians to start to see which of the many different pathogens,” said Davidson.

Highlighting that a tick bite carries several pathogens such as bacteria, parasites and viruses, Davidson said it is necessary to find out which pathogens and how many pathogens a patient has as well as when they appeared and then disappeared. “And we want to know why it was three years ago and now you lost your job because you can't read anymore? This was the critical piece with WRS. If anyone was to ask why did we buy WRS—that's why.”

While Davidson was seeking an EMR that would enable Optimal Health Physicians to connect with its patients and to learn more about patients, that's not all that Davidson was impressed with. “Being web based was of huge importance. We want to be able to work from anywhere, anytime. Our belief is that WRS is secure and in the cloud and we don't have to have three servers all backed up in order to not lose our patient data.”

Two additional features--e-prescribing and connectivity to large laboratories were also of paramount importance to Optimal Health Physicians.



## Getting Docs On Board The EMR Train

Acknowledging that one of the challenges of implementing an EMR is encouraging physicians who are not schooled in the latest state-of-the art technology to use a computer when seeing patients, Davidson said WRS has addressed this challenge with Dragon Naturally Speaking, Medical Edition. This component enables physicians to dictate information that turns up as text. “We can build our templates and all of our questions about your headache. We have two tablet computers. The physician can sit with the tablet on his lap or desk and look at the patient. The physician can just glance down and tap things into the system. Our goal is for the physicians to maintain eye contact with patients. We have one stylus that has a microphone on one end, so that the physician can talk into it. Those things have just been invented. That’s the other reason that it’s time to move into EMR systems. There was never enough bandwidth –you couldn’t have a high speed enough communication to the Internet to actually have these complex graphical interfaces show up on your screen. You’d be waiting three minutes for the screen to refresh. We have the speed and now we have these wonderful lightweight things you can touch and you can write in handwriting and it will recognize that pretty well and you can talk into them. So now we have human computer interface. People graduating from medical school now are going to expect this capability,” said Davidson.

## Peering in the Crystal Ball

So, what does the future hold for physician practices such as Optimal Health Physicians? The way Davidson reads the tea leaves, EMRs will be most useful when used primarily to help improve the quality of patient care. Davidson believes that Optimal Health Physicians’ staff and patients are now perfectly positioned to reap the benefits of a very powerful EMR software solution. “We’ve been working toward this EMR. We’ve been trying to get the technology in place to be sure the rest of the office knows how to schedule patients and check people out and do all of the other things that you can do with it. They understand that EMR is the world they have to live in. They are happy and satisfied with WRS,” Davidson concluded.

## Q&A

**Waiting Room Solutions:** What was life like before Optimal Health Physicians began implementing Waiting Room Solutions?

**Davidson:** We used paper charts that were hand written and scanned. A number of years ago, the practice started scanning the charts into PDF files. It took a couple of years of hiring people to sit and scan charts and put them in the right sequence and be sure the papers weren’t upside

down or backwards, and that Bill Smith and William Smith were actually two different people. Going from paper to pictures of paper was a huge process and it has efficiencies once it's done. You can pop the file open off the Internet and read the chart without having to ask somebody where they left the chart yesterday. Getting out of paper is great but that doesn't mean you get to an EMR. It's efficient just getting it off the paper into adobe Acrobat files. All the paper you continue to generate has to be scanned and put into those Adobe acrobat files so they are always being amended—always having new pages put in. But that's okay because it's electronic pages, instead of pieces of paper. You don't have to hole punch them; you just scan them in. That's a huge change in a medical practice.”

**Waiting Room Solutions:** How will you use WRS system to help you chart?

**Davidson:** We will upload every one of the patients into Waiting Room Solutions. We will upload the copy of the PDF file to their Waiting Room Solutions chart. So once in Waiting Room Solutions we can always pop open the historical documents and read them. If you practice real internal medicine, you have to know the person's history—and that means knowing years of their history.”

**Waiting Room Solutions:** How are the physicians in your practice adapting to EMR technology?

**Davidson:** “I've been around EMRs since they started thinking of them. We have WRS because we want to get data out. We want to customize what we collect and we want it all back so we can analyze it ourselves. The physicians here take an hour and a half to two hours per patient, per visit, and you can get an awful lot of information from patients. We needed a system that we could pile information into. Different doctors have different preferences. WRS system also allows you to put the information in via voice, text and keyboarding.”