

## Washington Street Wellness Center Uses EMR to Provide Out of the Box Care



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### Washington Street Wellness Center

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**Iowa City, Iowa**

They operate in an old Victorian house that dates back to the 1890s. And they are located on the edge of Iowa City’s downtown historic area. But despite these throwbacks to an earlier period of time, there is certainly nothing old fashioned about the way Washington Street Wellness operates. Take a closer look. Is that a futuristic EMR that they’re using? You bet it is.

Formerly known as the Bradley Center, Washington Street Wellness Center is an integrated medicine practice that is run by two doctors. Their vision is to provide patients with comprehensive, health centered personalized care, based on evolving science and experience based outcome measures, resulting in the highest possible quality of life for each patient.

The practice offers a plethora of healthcare services, including chronic illness management, wellness coaching, weight loss strategies, comprehensive pain management strategies, massage and stretching, food sensitivity testing, hormone testing, and a complete pharmacy of natural medicine.

Armed with a massage therapist and lifestyle educator, this 10-year-old practice was reestablished in October 2011. Dr. Jason Bradley, N.D., D.C. specializes in hormone replacement therapy and nutritional supplements and Dr. Cody Scharf, D.C. offers chiropractic services and sports medicine.

So bent on finding an EMR they can grow with, Washington Street Wellness spent two years evaluating 15 software systems. In April 2012, they selected WRS.

## Always Running

Pointing out that the practice used Medisoft for over 10 years, Dr. Jason Bradley said, “I wanted an online system. They don’t offer an online system. They offer a stand alone system in our office. I just don’t like that. I liked the idea of the cloud. The cloud was something I liked. I was impressed with allowing technology serve me instead of me serving the technology. Mobility was another impressive feature. There’s a lot that I like about the online system. Medisoft was pretty much out (of our EMR search) from the beginning. We were also fairly dissatisfied with some pieces of it. We were looking for a clean break. I was not in favor of storing my records internally. Accessing my records from anyplace was what I needed. I did not want to depend on our own computer failing. Since we are a small office, when it comes to money, it’s a major deal if one thing breaks. Our server was on its way out for a long time and I was anxious, when that server dies we have a big problem. Sure, we had disc images and back ups, but that’s not helpful in real time. With WRS, we know that the system is always operating.”

Explaining that 120 to 130 patients walk through their doors each week, Allison Hall, practice manager echoed Dr. Bradley’s sentiments concerning his preference for a cloud system. “Before WRS we had a billing system and the software updates that we had to pay for were incredibly expensive. We had a couple of problems with the server going down and not having access to any of our data. Even with the Internet we had a problem accessing our appointment list,” she said.

Emphasizing that WRS is the practice’s first EMR, Hall explained that they wanted an EMR that could fill several of its needs. “We needed to be able to handle medical billing. We also needed to run Meaningful Use Reports. We liked Gateway, the clearinghouse for WRS, and how it works. It makes it really easy to keep track of patients’ balances. Most of our patients are self-pay. We sell over 100 different nutritional supplements and we have to be able to input those items into the system. WRS has a way to track miscellaneous items and to track patients’ appointments. We use tracking to see when people have filled their lab orders so that I know which patients to call.”

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***“I’ve used the privacy forms from WRS for my patients. All of that is packaged in the system. That makes my life easier.”***

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## Texting Features

Emphasizing that most patients have already been seen by general practitioners, Dr. Bradley said, “They’ve been through that general medicine gamut. I’m not picking on that, but they are told, ‘There is nothing wrong with you.’ And they say, ‘How come I’m still really tired, depressed,

anxious, gaining weight, or have no libido? What is going on?' I'll take a look at various pieces of lab work, after interviewing them and doing comprehensive physicals and looking for any abnormalities. We'll look at their labs and we do fairly routine lab work. I specialize in nutritional and metabolic disorders. I'm looking for nutritional deficiencies and metabolic excesses. It could be too much estrogen, or too little thyroid hormone, or too little testosterone or progesterin. We try to create balance in that system. Over a decade and a half of doing this I have found that when we replete those nutritional and hormonal deficiencies and help the patients get rid of those metabolic excesses and create balance, whatever their diagnosis happens to be, starts to clear away."

Bradley recently saw an obese patient who had been hospitalized a few times for chest pain, but his EKG and stress and labs were normal. His doctor diagnosed him with anxiety and prescribed Lorazepam. "He said, 'What is going on? I don't feel anxious.' I suspect we'll find at a bare minimum, blood sugar metabolism issues, vitamin B and D deficiency, low thyroid, low testosterone and high estrogen. I do have a certain luxury; they've been to specialists before they see me, so a lot of the easy things are ruled out. I get to put on my thinking cap and play medical detective. We are not treating chest pains or weight or anxiety. We take their specific metabolic and nutritional needs and develop a plan specifically to address that. Sometimes we don't even address meds until down the road," said Dr. Bradley.

Another patient who came in for a six month check up had really high blood pressure and had taken a number of medications. When he said he was dizzy, Dr. Bradley took his blood pressure and found that it was 100/60. "I said 'let's cut your blood pressure meds in half and see how you are doing.' Once we replete, we remove and we balance. My job is to give a diagnosis and I have to put it in a category, but the way that it plays out is deficiencies, excesses, balance."

Dedicated to treating patients' specific needs so he can improve patient care, Dr. Bradley needed a system which would enable him to do his notes effectively. "With every patient encounter, I do free texting. I was dreading that at first but I actually like it now. When I see a patient today and then follow up with them in three months, I know exactly what to take care of, thanks to the fact that I can leave embedded notes to myself. That's great," stated Dr. Bradley.

"We chose WRS because we really liked the way the notes looked," agreed Hall.

## Cost Containment

The cost of an EMR is a major factor that influences the selection of an EMR system, and it can be a hindrance to a practice that doesn't have many providers. "We do believe it's cheaper than some and more expensive than others. I think what we will recover in collections will even out the cost. We just started billing in April. I'm seeing as I'm entering EOB's it is so easy to resend any

claims. I can tell already that WRS really helps with collection. You try to send the claim, then it goes through scrub, and then it pops back to you to fix. For example, if the diagnosis is not relevant to the CPT code, it catches that and can put the correct diagnoses,” said Hall.

“As far as per doctor fee and monthly fee, WRS is very affordable,” agreed Dr. Bradley, adding, “From a management and an administration stance, one of the critical things we were seeking was that the system integrates well with the clearinghouse and that it is capable of tracking write-offs. Making certain that we are seeing the cash flow come in from the right sources is crucial.”

## Inventory And Cash Flow

Washington Street Wellness Center prescribes nutritional supplements, and the practice has a dispensary on the premises so that it can offer patients the finest quality supplements, according to Dr. Bradley. “The good news is, there are a lot of nutritional supplements out there. Most of the stuff out there is pretty much junk. If we prescribe over the counter, a lot of times we don’t get good responses. We work exclusively with pharmaceutical companies that make nutritional supplements. They cost a little more, but the outcomes are a night and day difference. We keep a little dispensary here and any time we can let the patients get it directly from the manufacturer we do. It’s nice that we have our own natural dispensary and it works well with what I do and it’s convenient for the patients. When we looked for an EMR, keeping track of inventory and cash flow were important. It’s a huge expense to us. With our cash flow, we’re always saying, ‘Can I order this? Can I do this? It’s good if we can keep track of that cash flow and our inventory as easily as possible to find out where are the holes, how can we stop those holes from losing funds, like any business.”

## Cash Cow

There’s nothing like a good day at the office. For Washington Street Wellness Center good days keep on coming and they are a boon to the bottom line. “We were getting one additional service code that one of the doctors was doing with pretty much every patient and it was routinely getting denied and we were writing it off. The WRS scrubber feature said it was getting denied. We were over diagnosing and getting two diagnosis codes on it and WRS said that one of them was wrong. Once we fixed that, it made sense. As soon as we stopped applying that diagnosis code it starting going through and we start getting paid for it. That increased revenue by 20 to 25% per visit, just from that one code,” stated Dr. Bradley.

## Getting Off the Phone

According to Hall, having an EMR patient portal is easing the staff’s workload and it is also in-

creasing the practice's efficiency. "All of the paper work can be done on the portal and this saves patient lots of time. Patient reminders saved our office time too. We used to call each patient to remind them of their appointment. The system saves one to two hours of the receptionist's time each day," said Hall.

## Judging Certifications

Finding a company with reputable certifications and a user friendly software system were also high on Washington Street Wellness Center's EMR wish list. "Certifications did make a difference as far as reputation. We knew that WRS was a reputable company. Some programs we looked at were not nearly as physician or user friendly. WRS was very easy. We had a month and a half for the billing staff to learn. For training we did webinars and meetings over the phone," said Hall.

## Work and Family

These days, being able to work while on a vacation or at a meeting is a necessity. "If I need anything when I'm on a family vacation or at a conference, I can log in and check on things. That's been great. My patients are permitted to e-mail me. When I receive those e-mails, I can answer their questions without having to go to view the paper chart. I'm not having to wait to go in to the office or call my staff," remarked Dr. Bradley.

## Happy Days

Finally, now that Dr. Bradley and his practice manager have transitioned to a modern EMR system, they are finding that WRS is truly a good partner. "It came down to practicality and good user interface. We took that leap hoping that WRS would work well for both of us and it continues to improve and improve. Our issues that we needed addressed have been addressed fairly quickly. I like the system. WRS has answered all of the questions that we've posed. I recommend WRS and that really has meaning," asserted Dr. Bradley.

Perhaps Hall summed up the practice's relationship with WRS best when she said, "We were unable to run miscellaneous charge reports that we needed so we could pay taxes for sales tax. That was one of our concerns. Within a couple of weeks one of the WRS updates allowed us to run miscellaneous charge reports. The WRS staff was very helpful with whatever issues we had. We still feel absolutely comfortable calling people there for help."