PECOS VALLEY MEDICAL CENTER

WORLD-CLASS CARE IN A SMALL TOWN

improving healthcare together

Pecos Valley Medical Center

The Challenge

A Federally Qualified Health Center serving a large, rural area of New Mexico needed a strong healthcare IT partner to deliver on its mission of providing quality medical, dental, and behavioral health services to all in need.

The Solution

With Electronic Health Records from eClinicalWorks, the providers at Pecos Valley Medical Center have been able to provide comprehensive, high-quality services to their patients, and engage them more fully in their own health.

The Results

With a strong partnership with eClinicalWorks in place, Pecos Valley Medical Center has enhanced patient safety, improved compliance with UDS reporting, can more easily handle structured data, and has the insight and visibility needed to focus care on patients facing challenges with COPD, diabetes, high blood pressure, and other chronic conditions.

A Tiny Community on the Medical Frontier

The community of Pecos, New Mexico is surrounded by thousands of square miles of the Santa Fe National Forest, whose firs, junipers and oaks blend with sagebrush and sandstone to create landscapes of golden and green, purple and rust red. Fly fishermen and hikers love to explore the Pecos Wilderness just to the north. Tourists come to explore Native American ruins dating back 2,500 years. And Civil War aficionados stop at nearby Glorieta Pass, where in March 1862 Colorado militiamen blunted a Confederate advance at the "Gettysburg of the West."

Dr. Lucien D. Young,
Chief Medical Officer

Pecos is a place of quiet, rural beauty, and probably the last place you'd expect to encounter the future of healthcare and healthcare IT. For that, you figure you'd probably have to drive half an hour west to Santa Fe, the state capital, with its 85,000 people, vibrant cultural scene, and advanced medical institutions.

Except that you wouldn't. Because right here in Pecos, the staff of Pecos Valley Medical Center, a Federally Qualified Health Center, is pushing its way toward the medical frontier, working closely with eClinicalWorks to implement healthcare IT tools and technologies that would be right at home in any more sophisticated, urban setting.

Dr. Lucien D. Young, D.O., chief medical officer at Pecos Valley Medical Center, has been in practice for 45 years, including the last 14 at Pecos Valley, where he has seen enormous growth.

"I feel like it's my baby," Dr. Young said. "I've got my heart in this. It's my passion. And it's changing rapidly. I'm trying to stay up with it,

In an area where medical care is hard to find, internet service is spotty, and many folks lack the means or desire to travel to Santa Fe to see a doctor, Pecos Valley Medical Center has a very simple and vital mission: Provide the best possible healthcare to every patient in need, regardless of their ability to pay.

and trying to get my staff to stay up with it, and understand why we're doing it, and what good it's doing for us and our families and our patients."

Even as early as 1975, when he first obtained his medical license. Dr. Lucien D. Young recognized that efficient and effective medicine would require finding a replacement for paper records.

'Paper Wasn't Going to Work'

In an area where medical care is hard to find, internet service is spotty, and many folks lack the means or desire to travel to Santa Fe to see a doctor, Pecos Valley Medical Center has a very simple and vital mission: Provide the best possible healthcare to every patient in need, regardless of their ability to pay.

"It was about 1975 that I got my license and started working," Dr. Young said, "and I immediately realized that paper wasn't going to work, and didn't know what to do. Because computers were just being used for billing, mostly. But I thought there might be a way to put the chart on the computer."

It would take many years, a whole lot of technical developments, and even a few rounds of incentives from the federal government for Dr. Young's vision to be realized. And while the journey is far from complete, the fact that providers in a small place like Pecos now have the tools necessary to seize the opportunities presented by value-based care is a testament to the enduring value of making Electronic Health Records an integral part of medicine.

"It just makes things safer, and it makes them more efficient," Dr. Young said.

A Health Center Is Born and Grows

Pecos Valley Medical Center traces its origin to 1975, when the National Health Service Corps designated Pecos a Medically Underserved Area and Health Professional Service Area and assigned Dr. Napoleon Ortiz to provide medical services. Three years later, it was designated a Rural Health Center (RHC). Pecos Valley Medical Center, Inc. was incorporated in 1982, and a decade later the RHC designation was changed to a Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC).

Today, Pecos Valley provides a full range of medical and dental services to residents of western San Miguel and eastern Santa Fe counties, some 7,500 square miles. It is no longer necessary for patients to drive to Santa Fe to get the care they need.

"We serve everybody, regardless of their ability to pay. Just anybody who needs any kind of medical, dental, or behavioral healthcare," said Director of Admissions Toni Rodriguez, who adds that while many of Pecos Valley's patients are native Spanish speakers, that presents no difficulties, since the majority of the staff are fluent in Spanish.

Pecos Medical Center has added a van service that helps bring patients who lack transportation or the ability to drive a way to get to and from their medical appointments.

"We're the only medical center within 25 or 30 miles, so pretty much we're the primary medical and dental for all the people in the Pecos area," said Chief Financial Officer Michael Easley. "We've got about 3,500 active patients right now, and between 10,000 and 11,000 appointments annually. We've been growing pretty steadily, especially over the past few years."

Easley said that because transportation is an issue for many patients, Pecos Valley recently obtained a van so they can pick up patients who might otherwise be unable to get to the health center.

To accommodate growth, Pecos Valley will be breaking ground in the spring of 2018 on an 18-month project to construct a new health center building.

UDS Reporting: A Key to Quality

That kind of visible growth is evidence of success, but no less real is the growth that takes place behind the scenes, in the software and systems that make it possible to deliver quality care.

"The reporting aspect of eClinicalWorks assists us in finding out what the needs of the community are," Rodriguez said. "We can see how many people have COPD, or high blood pressure, or diabetes, and we know what we need to focus on in our medical practice and what kind of providers we need to have here for our patients."

As an FQHC, Pecos Valley focuses a good deal of attention on UDS reports and has made good use of the templates that eClinicalWorks provides to meet those requirements.

"If it wasn't on the alert, we may not have said 'You know, you need your preventive screening mammogram,' and that actually provides a way to identify breast cancer at an early stage," said Dr. Ana Maria Rael, Chief Medical Officer. "So, I think the UDS measures have helped tremendously. Everything is in one place, so I can sit down and find telephone messages, my lab results, my Progress Notes, all on one site. That helps to provide better continuity of care."

Maximizing the utility of the software that helps deliver quality care is also a job for those behind the scenes, including Clinical Informatics Analyst Alessandro Briancesco, who specializes in dealing with structured data fields.

"For example, we were showing a significant drop with our BMI nutrition counseling and interventions," Briancesco said. "It turned out that just a couple of fields were missing, so the users were actually documenting it in a free-text section of the note. Once we were able to link that, we saw a dramatic increase in that reporting."

Patient Iris Sena, who moved to the Pecos area with her husband for their retirement, says she immediately felt at home as a patient at Pecos Medical Center.

Even More Key: The Human Touch

Such technical expertise may be under-appreciated by patients, whose interactions normally involve front-office personnel,

providers, and perhaps a lab technician, but it is as vital to the smooth operation of the health center as the smiles, caring, and medications dispensed to patients.

"Anytime you receive a call from someone asking how you're doing, you really feel like that provider, that nurse, that user really cares for you," said Briancesco, who is himself a patient at Pecos Valley. "When I get that call, not only do I know that the workflow is working great, but I feel like my nurse, my provider really cares about what's going on with my health."

> " The reporting aspect of eClinicalWorks assists us in finding out what the needs of the community are. We can see how many people have COPD, or high blood pressure, or diabetes, and we know what we need to focus on in our medical practice, and what kind of providers we need to have here for our patients. "
>
> — Toni Rodriguez, Director of Administration

"They just have a lot more to offer," said patient Iris Sena, who moved to the Pecos area with her husband following his retirement about 15 years ago. "I started by going to the dentist here, and I was very comfortable. They did an appointment for a physical, and I immediately felt at home."

Sena, like many patients across the country today, defies stereotypes about aging and technology. Far from shunning computers and apps and smartphones, many embrace them.

"I do use Patient Portal," Sena said. "I especially like the reminders, because I'm good at forgetting things, so in spite of my big calendar with the stickers, I definitely check my email every day. It's also really helpful for the lab results. You don't have to wait for the doctor to call you."

Following Through on Care

For Viola and Gilbert Roybal, Pecos Valley is close to home and a place where they feel appreciated.

"What I like about them is they call after we come in for an appointment," Viola said. "They follow up and check on him to see how he's doing, which is great. And if he has any problems, they say just bring him in; you don't need an appointment. Dr. Young is awesome. He's always there."

For his part, Dr. Young credits the technology for making a critical difference.

"I think the most important part of the electronic program is safety," he said. "We don't give them the wrong drugs. We don't give them drugs that they are allergic to, that we didn't see on the paper chart. I think we've helped people get better, faster. The technology is not changing what people come in with, of course, but it changes how effective we are in the treatment, recommendations, and referrals."

Don't Forget the Dental

Another factor setting Pecos Valley apart is that, like many other health centers, dental services are an integral part of the services they provide.

Prior to the advent of electronic records, said Dr. Julastene Dyer-Moore, Chief Dental Officer at Pecos Valley, there was frequent confusion regarding what services had been provided and what remained to be done. Now, the Electronic Dental Record makes that information available to every provider.

"Now we're just able to open the electronic chart and we can see everything that needs to be done. We can see what they came in with, and we can see what we've done for them," she said. "We can tie that into the billing so that we are able to accurately bill, and as a patient schedules future appointments, we are able to make sure it's done accurately and appropriately."

Pecos Medical Center provides a comprehensive range of services, including dental, which providers view as integral to a holistic approach to health.

Rodriguez noted that Dr. Dyer-Moore was named Provider of the Year by the New Mexico Primary Care Association, further confirmation of the value and importance of a holistic approach to patient care, one in which medical and dental services are no longer viewed separately but are each seen as key to ensuring wellness.

"She has proven to be a major asset to Pecos Valley Medical Center," Rodriguez said.

"I see things getting more electronic and more digital as we move into services and people that are more excited about, social media and things of that nature, and we are all connected to phones," Dr. Dyer-Moore added. "I hope to see a software that allows us to text patients, to email patients, or to connect with them in other ways that they might be using, more often than a phone call."

Safety + Interoperability = Quality Care

In many ways, Pecos Valley is typical of the frontline medicine that health centers deliver nationwide. They are in touch with the community, providing medical services and education, including school-based health clinics to provide vaccinations and assess health risk in children.

They follow up with each patient. And they are increasingly sophisticated and effective when it comes to employing the variety of healthcare IT tools available today.

Dr. Lucien D. Young used Dragon software for more efficient documentation of patient cases.
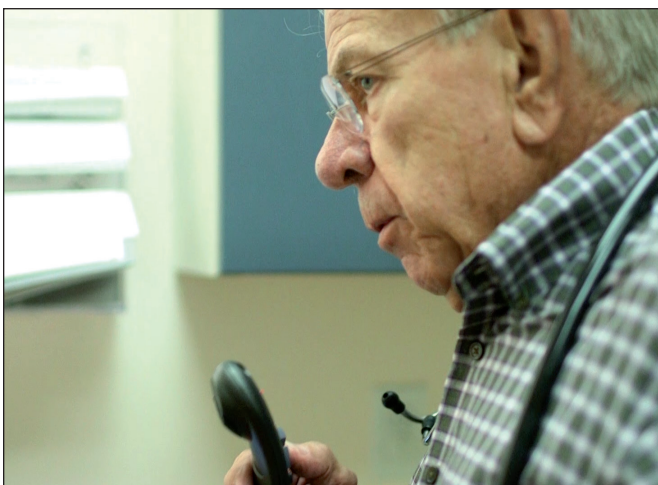
Dr. Young noted that in the past, practices without Electronic Medical Records would often repeat the same procedures and repeat the same errors.

"Again, I think safety is always the first thing," he said. "And now we have a system that says 'That's a mistake.'"

With safeguards in place, providers are able to confidently employ tools for more efficient clinical documentation.

"I used to dictate into a phone, and then everything changed over to EMR," Dr. Rael said. "But Dragon has actually helped make things very efficient for us, too. That's helped, I think, providers to find everything in one spot, also helped to provide continuity of

care. I'm hopeful that at some point we'll be able to access all medical records. It would be nice if my patient was admitted to the hospital to be able to just pull up those notes right away, to have a big patient database would be awesome, so I could pull records from Maine, from California, without having to wait for this big transfer of care and so forth."

That day is not far off. Through eClinicalWorks, providers at Pecos Valley are gaining access to a wealth of patient data available through the nationwide Carequality and CommonWell networks.

Excellence, Day After Day

Meanwhile, the health center's IT staff are there to help providers with their day-to-day documentation needs, solving problems and making suggestions for the latest tools to meet their needs. Briancesco said providers sometimes tell him they feel they are spending as much or more time on the computer as with a patient. In such cases, he said, Scribe can be a useful tool to help with documentation while maintaining the personal touch so key to effective medical practice.

"We have a great IT team," Dr. Rael said. "Anytime we have any problem whatsoever, whether it's uploading UDS measures, vaccines, or problems with Dragon, they come down immediately."

And when the IT staff need help, they too have a place to turn — to the experts at eClinicalWorks.

I really appreciate the support I get whenever I call eClinicalWorks," Briancesco said. "Within an hour, I can chat with a knowledge technician. They help us optimize the system based on their knowledge of what we're struggling with over here. We're a little village. We really don't have that much internet, or strong internet here. So, they're very patient with us when they're working with us, updates, pulling reports. It's very nice. It's very personal the care that we get from eClinicalWorks."

Caring providers. The latest in healthcare IT. All available in one of the most beautiful corners of America. Pecos Valley Medical Center may be small, but they are showing the way to the future of community medicine. ■