

eClinicalWorks

CASE STUDY



RIVER ROAD MEDICAL GROUP, EUGENE, OREGON

PROVIDING QUALITY PRIMARY FAMILY HEALTHCARE SINCE 1961

improving healthcare together

River Road Medical Group, Eugene, Oregon

How an Established eClinicalWorks Practice Uses EHR Innovations for Better Care

The Challenge

A small, well-established family practice clinic sought ways to continue to provide the highest quality care while adapting to the changing world of healthcare, including Population Health challenges and the impact of value-based Medicare payment reforms.

The Solution

Already veteran users of eClinicalWorks, the providers at River Road Medical Group have implemented Patient Portal, Messenger, and other tools to improve Patient Engagement, while working closely with eClinicalWorks experts to prepare for MACRA, MIPS, and other changes.

The Results

River Road Medical Group made effective use of electronic reminders and patient education, resulting in a 30% increase in the practice's colonoscopy screening rate; the practice put about 65% of patients online with Patient Portal; and in 2014, River Road was the only practice in its Coordinated Care Organization (CCO) to meet all 12 quality benchmarks.

Serving Oregonians Since 1961

Established in 1961, River Road Medical Group is a small, independent family practice clinic serving more than 4,000 patients in and around Eugene, Oregon, at the southern end of the Willamette Valley. With five providers, a staff of 19, and both lab and x-ray facilities onsite, River Road has been using eClinicalWorks Electronic Health Records since March 2007 to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of their practice.

"We have been serving our community through generations," said Dr. Patricia Buchanan, family practice physician and River Road's owner, who joined the practice in 1984. "We have patients, their children, and their grandchildren. We feel very connected to our community."

Both Dr. Buchanan and Josie Van Scholten, River Road's practice manager, clearly recall how the practice operated before having an EHR.

"We had six people working the front desk," Van Scholten said. "Now we only have two, because one job was essentially to roam around the office. We called it 'chart aerobics,' because you essentially couldn't help a patient until you found their chart! Now, with eClinicalWorks, we just look up the patient, and the information we need is right there. eClinicalWorks really is our lifeline."

"Over these 10 years, I really do feel that we are offering better patient care through the EHR," Dr. Buchanan said. "We can monitor patients' data and risk, office visits, prescriptions, prescription monitoring, vital signs, and pull up past records. Everything is available immediately with a click. I have been very pleased with eClinicalWorks. It's as easy to use as any I have ever seen. I know providers in other clinics who have changed once or even twice to others. We have not felt that necessity."

Adapting to Changes in Healthcare

While Dr. Buchanan and the rest of the staff at River Road never doubted their choice of an EHR vendor, they have had to work hard over the years to sustain their small, independent practice as healthcare — and the business of healthcare — have faced changes and challenges.

One of the first hurdles — one sometimes overlooked in an era when EHRs are nearly universal in medical practices across the U.S. — was the need to remain focused on patients amid the technology available right in the exam room.

A study by Northwestern Medicine, published in the March 2014 issue of *The International Journal of Medical Informatics*, found that physician and patient eye gaze patterns were significantly affected by the rise of EHRs and differed markedly from the patterns that prevailed when paper charts were dominant.¹

River Road staff cited several examples of how the methods that they had been using to engage patients were not producing the results they wanted to see. All that changed with new and more powerful tools from eClinicalWorks.

“I can remember a few patients who did not like it when we switched to computers in the room,” Dr. Buchanan noted. “I have made a big effort to try to maintain eye contact with the patients during the visit as much as I could. I think they have received this transition without any problems or complaints.”

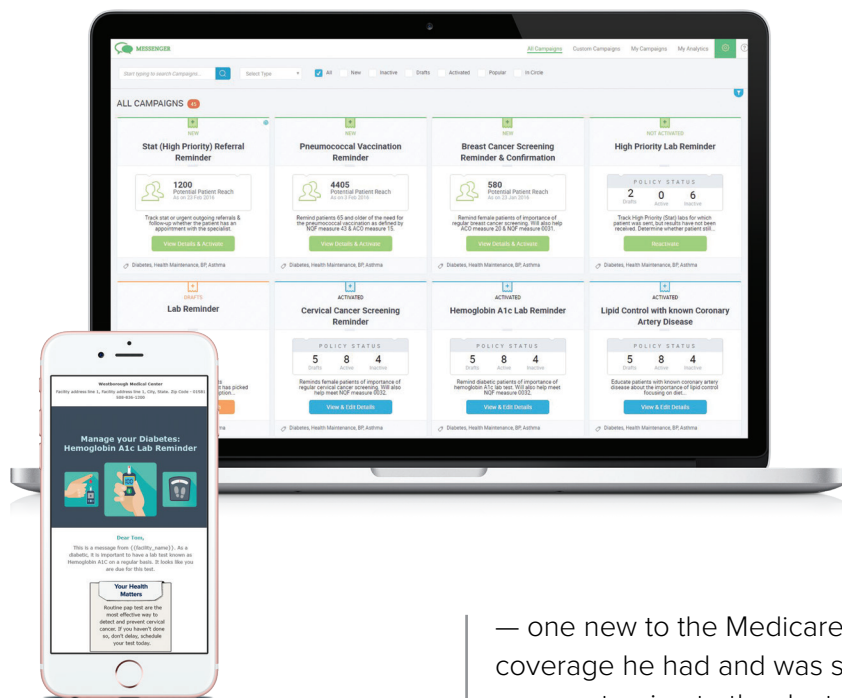
More generally, River Road’s providers and staff have found that along with the power and functionality of an EHR comes the need for ongoing education in how to get the most out of it. Just as healthcare is in constant

motion, EHR providers such as eClinicalWorks are constantly seeking innovations to improve the power and range of the tools they provide.

More Effective Patient Engagement

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¹ <https://news.northwestern.edu/stories/2014/01/do-doctors-spend-too-much-time-looking-at-computer-screen>



Messenger contains a patient-centric suite of health and wellness campaigns that will automate outreach for pertinent health reminders and engages patients effortlessly with important preventive, administrative, clinical, disease management, and wellness messages.

“I remember the day I figured out we had sent one patient 11 letters reminding her that she was due for a mammogram,” Van Scholten said. “That’s not an effective system!”

Instead of repeatedly sending out letters — which is expensive, time-consuming, and slow — River Road now uses eClinicalWorks’ Messenger campaigns to reach out to patients through email and texts. They reserve staff phone time to reach out to those patients who do not respond.

Van Scholten cited another patient — one new to the Medicare system — who didn’t understand the coverage he had and was so discouraged that he planned on never returning to the doctor’s office. But the providers knew that he needed to control his blood pressure. They reached out to him, helped him understand his coverage, and got him back into the office for an exam. There, he learned that not only would he not need medication, but that he could monitor and control his blood pressure himself.

“He was very excited, very receptive, and is planning on using the healow app to monitor his blood pressure,” she said.

River Road’s quality care manager, Megan Fields, has focused on closing gaps in care, which begins with more effective patient outreach. Sometimes that’s achieved through the Patient Portal, or the convenience of Kiosk check-in, which can be used for questionnaires that save providers time by better preparing them for the exam itself.

At other times, the human touch is required.

I think when you start talking to the patients, you realize what the real barriers are,” Fields said, recalling a diabetic patient who was using the emergency room for her care because transportation was a problem for her. After River Road identified the problem and arranged rides for that patient through a transportation provider, the patient was able to avoid using the emergency room and kept regular appointments with her provider.

Using All the eClinicalWorks Tools

As these examples demonstrate, effective Patient Engagement relies upon both great technology *and* effective communication

among medical providers, patients, and the people behind the scenes, including a practice's office staff and the developers and account managers at eClinicalWorks.

No matter how good the technology is, implementation and follow-up are a matter of hard work.

To ensure success, Van Scholten said providers are constantly asking patients who come in for their regular

appointments to consider signing up for the Portal and following up to make sure they are comfortable accessing their records online.

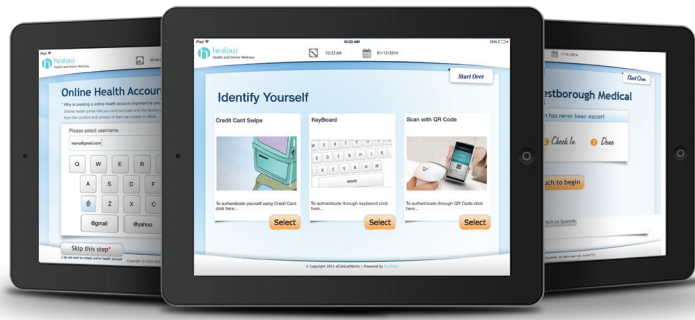
The practice has also used student volunteers to help train patients in Portal and Kiosk in the waiting area, and is planning to put an eClinicalWorks video on the waiting room TV set.

"I don't think the patients really understand how much in primary care is done by the support staff," Fields said, adding that the practice has emphasized a push to increase the number of patients having wellness visits, both because that leads to more effective prevention of illness and because payers are increasingly willing to pay for prevention.

"We rely pretty heavily on eClinicalWorks," she said. "The text messages are huge, because patients are so busy. The registry. And the HEDIS® dashboards. And we're looking forward to mobile tools so that on-call doctors have access and can document and prescribe when outside the office. Without the tools eClinicalWorks provides, we wouldn't have been able to do what we do."

Demonstrating Improvement

Today, after 10 years of continuous improvements with eClinicalWorks and several years of focused efforts on Patient Engagement, River Road Medical Group can boast of having web-enabled 2,700 patients, about 65% of all those they serve.



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“Like anything, you have to build it up so that you get to that critical mass,” Van Scholten said. “I feel like we’re on the cusp of being able to make important changes in people’s lives.”

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In 2014, about 27% of the practice’s patients were compliant with recommendations for colonoscopies. Providers and staff were finding it difficult to increase that number through traditional phone calls, because patients either ignored the messages or made appointments they did not keep. So River Road switched tactics, using eClinicalWorks partner Healthwise to

provide patients with education on colon cancer, either as printouts offered during an office visit or by publishing documents to the Patient Portal.

By helping patients understand the available choices — rather than preaching or lecturing — the practice saw compliance increase by nearly a third, to 35% at the end of 2015.

Recognition and Future Prospects

River Road has received broader recognition for its hard work. In 2014, it was the only family practice in its Coordinated Care Organization (CCO) to meet all 12 quality benchmarks.

River Road’s successful blend of innovation, incentives, and *a realistic timeline* reflects the experience of CCOs throughout Oregon, as detailed in a July 2015 Health Affairs [blog post](#).²

“Laying the groundwork is pivotal,” Van Scholten said. “It’s OK to take it slow, take bits and pieces. To say, let’s start with flu shots, something simple. It doesn’t have to be all or nothing.”

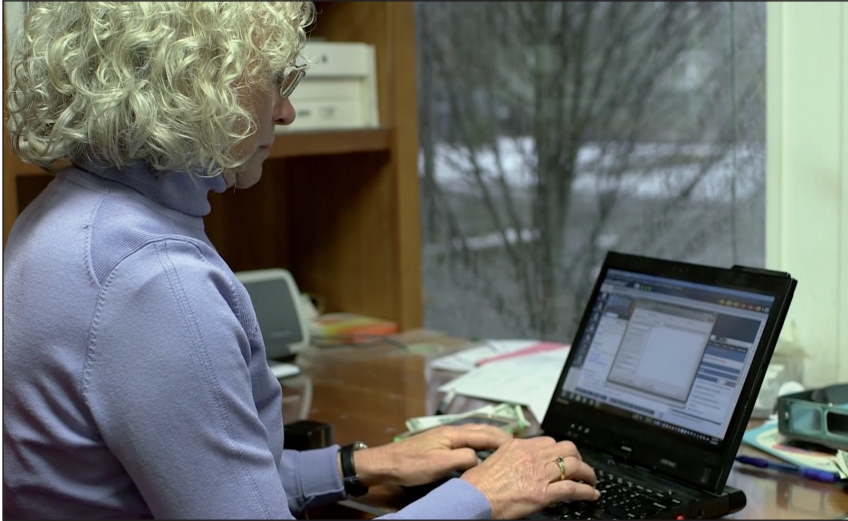
Their work with eClinicalWorks has increased the practice’s efficiency and put them in a position to take full advantage of other online resources and technologies.

² <http://healthaffairs.org/blog/2015/07/15/year-two-capturing-the-evolution-of-oregons-ccos/>

“We’ve also started experimenting with Google ads,” Van Scholten added. And River Road’s website features a link for patients to book appointments.

The slow, steady approach means that many of River Road’s providers, but not all, have opened their schedules to online

booking. That’s a move that Van Scholten saw as a great way for a small, independent practice to set itself apart from larger networks. Patients enjoy the convenience it offers, and thus far the participating providers’ schedules have not been overwhelmed. Again, it’s a matter of provider preference and making sure an innovation is right for everyone, rather than simply imposing it.



Dr. Patricia Buchanan has used eClinicalWorks to improve the efficiency of her practice at River Road Medical Group.

As the future of healthcare continues to unfold — bringing value-based care, new technologies, and patients who are increasingly engaged in their own care — River Road knows eClinicalWorks will be there to help.

With everything that she does at the practice, Van Scholten said that having reliable contacts at eClinicalWorks gives her peace of mind that she and her colleagues can keep pace with a rapidly changing field and remain focused on providing high-quality care.

“I don’t know that I’d be able to do all the research on the many quality programs,” Van Scholten said. “So having a single resource is very valuable.”

“Everything that eClinicalWorks offers helps,” Dr. Buchanan said. “The data tracking. The alerts. Online scheduling. It has all offered greater ease of care. I don’t think there’s any question that the future of healthcare involves more and more technology and increased interoperability. I think that’s very exciting, and I look forward to it.” ■



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