MEDICAL DERMATOLOGY SPECIALISTS

"The high level of efficiency we’re experiencing with the Aprima system is a tremendous result – and exactly what I was hoping to achieve with an EHR."
– Dr. Lindsay Ackerman, MD, Medical Dermatology Specialists

Like many dermatologists, Dr. Lindsay Ackerman was on the lookout for technologies and solutions that address common dermatological practice problems. From an electronic health record (EHR), she needed:

- Efficient coding to ease billing
- Capability to add service lines
- Ability to control costs
- Streamlined documentation process
- Flexible, customizable system

Dr. Ackerman understood that EHRs improve workflows and patient outcomes. In order to overcome her limited EHR knowledge, she invested a full year prior to opening her practice and researched the features, benefits, implementation processes and prices of a handful of EHR/PM (practice management) systems. She specifically focused on systems known to meet the needs of smaller physician practices. And particular importance was placed on finding an EHR with a dermatology database, as well as one that the staff would feel comfortable using once the practice was up and running.

“This piece was really important to me. Nothing is worse than launching a new practice with an untested system that your staff doesn’t understand. I needed a system that they would be able to use in day-to-day operations,” explained Dr. Ackerman. “Clinicians and practice staff need time and training to take full advantage of system features and functions. We wanted to make sure that workflows were not disrupted and that patient care was seamless. I did not want a system that left me visibly frustrated.”

EHR IMPLEMENTATION

Dr. Ackerman initially chose an EHR product from a vendor other than Aprima. While it was known for its dermatology-specific capabilities, she eventually found navigation and training difficult and cumbersome. In addition, fewer than six weeks before Dr. Ackerman’s practice was scheduled to open, the EHR system she’d initially chosen remained unavailable for implementation.

“I was committed to having an EHR system up and running on the practice’s opening day,” explained Dr. Ackerman. “I needed another solution fast, so I contacted Aprima. They assured me that we could implement their EHR within three weeks – just enough time for the practice staff to become familiar with the system’s features and functions. Needless to say, I was skeptical.”

“After running through the Aprima system, I was very impressed with its customization capabilities, easy navigation and the ability to add my own common problem pallet. I quickly cancelled my agreement with the first vendor, and opted to go with Aprima.”
When a new staff member came on board in February 2009, she quickly picked up the system’s features and functions.

— Dr. Lindsay Ackerman, MD, Medical Dermatology Specialists

**THREE-WEEK TURNAROUND**

To ensure the practice had a fully functioning EHR system on opening day, Aprima spent just over two weeks focusing on the implementation, testing and multiple three-hour training sessions with Dr. Ackerman’s staff. During these sessions, the staff was led through multiple demonstrations and learned how to operate the practice management and EHR features. Within relatively short order, the staff was able to begin documenting information into the EHR.

Training included:

- Coding and billing
- Appointment scheduling
- Medical records
- Reporting features

“Our three-person staff invested more than 300 hours in getting training on the first system I had, but they continued to have difficulty operating it and understanding some of its features,” said Dr. Ackerman. “In comparison, staff members felt comfortable and ready to use Aprima’s system after just two weeks of training.”

The success experienced by Dr. Ackerman’s staff over a short time is a tribute to Aprima’s extensive, thorough training program. In fact, Aprima remained onsite during the first two days the program went live in order to immediately troubleshoot any issues that arose.

**RESULTS, SUCCESSES**

As the practice moves into its third year, Dr. Ackerman remains impressed with Aprima’s features. She values the ease of customizing the system at any time, allowing for flexibility to meet evolving needs. She appreciates being able to document multiple complaints without having to switch between templates like other systems work. And she finds great value in having the dermatology exam and diagnosis in a single record.

Dr. Ackerman and her staff are able to take care of patients in a quick, manageable fashion by having instant access to records and history, a result that has also led to high productivity and the ability to see a high volume of patients.

For those physicians interested in introducing, upgrading or changing over to an EHR system, Dr. Ackerman offers this advice: “Be sure to get involved early on as it can take months to investigate systems and receive proposals from vendors that meet pre-defined criteria. As you research, be sure to look for a vendor with a track record of innovation, one that will be able to respond to and grow with the needs of your practice.”

Dr. Ackerman’s additional advice includes:

- Be prepared and plan accordingly for slowdowns during the implementation process
- Set aside at least two or three days for training on the system
- Look at practical features such as having enough room to record notes
- Re-examine your practice’s goals and objectives. Be sure that the system contributes to practice productivity, efficiency and quality patient care.

Dr. Lindsay Ackerman, the founding dermatologist and now one of two practicing dermatologists at Phoenix, AZ-based Medical Dermatology Specialists, is no stranger to doing things from the ground up. The American Academy of Dermatology Task Force member and graduate of Tulane University and the University of Arizona College of Medicine, launched her practice in October 2008. She added a second dermatologist, Dr. Margaret Kessler, in the fall of 2009. The practice serves a wide range of patients who require care for conditions ranging from general dermatology issues to severe medical skin conditions.