

The Challenge—Getting Software for Your Practice

By David Roberson

You've worked hard. You've brought to bear all of your expertise and the prognosis for the patient is excellent. Now comes the real challenge—how do you get paid for what you have done without spending a year's budget to keep track of your services? You know you need something, but what?

When we opened our practice, we checked with a couple of private practices that we knew and used a local software vendor that they suggested. The DOS-based system worked fine, but when everything moved to a Windows-based system, the DOS program just could not keep up. The vendor realized this and converted the program to a Windows-based system utilizing a transition package.

Although the transition went smoothly when a few years of patient data were moved to the Window system, this software system was still not as easy to use as we wanted. There were too many screens to traverse from appointments to charging to receiving payments and back to scheduling. And once we billed the insurance companies, tracking the delinquent insurance claims and rebilling was difficult. The front office was not happy!

We went back to other private practices in our area for suggestions on what they were using. We also expanded our search to include recommendations in the APTA literature. The literature contained excellent suggestions for software packages that many physical therapy clinics were using. At the time, however, the price range (\$10,000-\$50,000) was more than we felt we could spend. The big boys could pay for those packages, but not us.

During the search, we received a mass mailing from a software vendor claiming that its system was so easy that a baby could use it. The only babies we could see were the crying ones trying to schedule patients, enter charges and payments, and work accounts receivable with our present system. We requested the free demonstration in hopes of stopping the crying.

The Practice Solution™ TPS by EON Systems works from the appointment book screen as the diving force for all operations. Once you have loaded your patient, insurance, and billing information into the system, it opens to a screen that looks like

an appointment book. From this screen, you can schedule, charge, and receive payments. Patient phone numbers, insurance company information, and patient account balances are all on this screen. The cycle of scheduling for the next appointment, entering charges, receiving, and posting payment takes us about 45 seconds to accomplish. The patient's check-writing speed will affect the time.

Setting up the system will take a little time, but once it is loaded, the system works very well. You can load your other system's data yourself or purchase various levels of conversions from EON. The training CDs, the online help, and the new help screens cover every question you could ask. If, after consulting all of these tools, you still have questions, the support staff at EON is wonderful.

Can you tell, from your sticky notes, what was the last conversation you had with the insurance company about an unpaid claim? In the insurance follow-up center, every delinquent claim is listed under the insurance company with the patient name and charges. If you have loaded your insurance information, the contact person and phone number are listed on the screen for your convenience. One click and you can type a summary of the conversation, schedule a follow-up date to confirm that the check is in the mail, and then move to the next patient issue.

The Practice Solution TPS can handle multiple therapists and locations. Additional terminal use is available. Our practice is set up for multiple users, and the cost was about one-third that of comparable packages. The Documentor program can be added for those who want to use writing tablets to speed up note writing.

Our company feels that with web-based applications, practitioners can lose control of their data. However, at some point, EON Systems will be making a version that allows patients to make or change appointments via the web. With progressive ideas like these, we are quite pleased with the capacity, cost, and support of The Practice Solution TPS. ■

David Roberson, owner of Physical Therapy of Mansfield, can be reached at Davrob5@yahoo.com