



3-minute case study: Built-in documentation time

By Lia Novotny | November 19, 2018

The problem

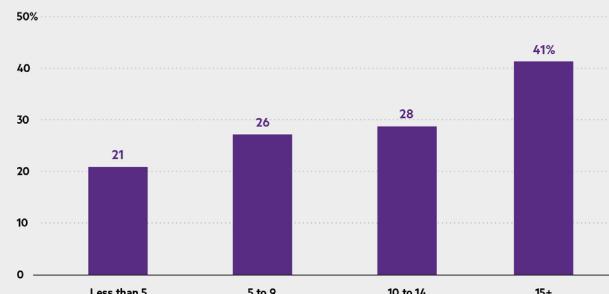
OurHealth, an organization that contracts with employers to provide on-site healthcare, noticed that its physicians were spending time after-hours and on weekends finishing their charting and other documentation.

That's in line with data from the athenahealth network, which found that more than one-third of 1,391 practicing physicians surveyed in June 2018 report working at least 10 hours a week outside of business hours. Some 17 percent are putting in 15 hours or more at home, and, at this point, burnout rates start to skyrocket.

The solution

OurHealth recently began reserving 45 minutes each day for physicians to catch up on documentation and other administrative work. Teressa McKoy Watts, M.D., medical director of OurHealth's Charlotte, North Carolina practice, says that the time is automatically built into each

Percentage of physicians showing significant signs of burnout by hours spent working at home outside of normal business hours



Source: athenahealth
Sample: Survey of 1,391 physicians, June 2018. Methodology available at athenahealth.com/insight/methodology.

physician's appointment schedule and does not result in longer hours overall or a decrease in patient load. Physicians use this time, first and foremost, to enter data into the EHR, review test results, fill out forms, and handle medication requests and prior authorizations.

Physicians who are caught up on their documentation can use the time for other care-related tasks at their discretion. The staff benefits from knowing physicians

will be more likely to complete paperwork the rest of them need to do their jobs, such as forms for workers comp or family medical leave.

This built-in discretionary time also gives physicians the flexibility to see more patients during busy times, such as flu season. Watts says, "When I am all caught up on my notes and I know we have a wait list, I will have the staff call patients and get them in same day, especially kids – I think it actually improves efficiency."

The outcome

Watts indicates the availability of more same-day appointments has shrunk the practice's wait list and led to higher patient satisfaction. And physicians and staff report that they are more caught up on their administrative tasks - Watts says overtime is now "almost nonexistent."

OurHealth's provider documentation time averages 8.3 minutes per encounter, down two minutes from its previous platform and significantly better than the industry average of 19 minutes. This improvement translates to more than \$600,000 in provider hours saved each year. And, most importantly, it creates more provider-patient time.

Overall, Watts says this simple change has reduced the stress that many physicians feel – and freed them up to focus on their patients and professional enrichment.

Lia Novotny is a contributing writer for athenaInsight.

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