

CASE STUDY

Joseph Aloise, DO Family Practice North Fort Myers, Florida

Solo Family Practice Thrives with "An Army of Support"

"It's always an uphill battle in healthcare," says Tia Melot, practice manager at Dr. Joseph Aloise's primary care practice. "Before athenahealth, we were doing all kinds of paperwork. We were having problems with our EHR. We didn't have enough time with patients."

Before partnering with athenahealth, practice staff were overwhelmed with billing, eligibility checking, and quality reporting. Clinicians had too much paperwork and not enough time with patients. That changed in 2014 when the practice transitioned to athenaOne, a fully-integrated network-enabled service for EHR, practice management, patient engagement, and care coordination. Since then, they have seen dramatic improvements in their collections, days in accounts receivable (DAR), and workflows—as well as a significant increase in quality program payments. The practice is now thriving and confidently prepared for the future.

Easier Workflows, Stronger Collections

"After we went live with athenaOne, we had a 30 percent increase in collections," says Ms. Melot. "Our DAR went from 45 to 19 days. And our time of service collections is 92 percent." Those are impressive statistics from a practice that used to worry about paying bills each month.

"Before athena, we were using a billing system that we weren't completely confident in," says Ms. Melot. "athena has thousands of claim scrub edits and rules. It's easy to submit the claim and get paid in a short amount of time without having to worry about denials." That's because athenahealth's Billing Rules Engine keeps claims clean by automatically flagging issues before they're submitted, and back-office teams track claims and manage issues on the practice's behalf.

Dr. Aloise and Yeidhit Cherenek-Randall, the practice's physician assistant, appreciate how easy it is to correctly code each visit. "My favorite feature of athenaClinicals [the EHR service integrated in athenaOne] is how easy it is to find the right codes," says Dr. Aloise. "I spend much less time doing notes and coding now."

Substantial Quality Program Bonuses

For many practices, value-based reimbursement can be a challenge. And every dollar counts. With dedicated quality management experts and intuitive workflows, athenahealth helps practices succeed in the rapidly changing environment of value-based care.

With their previous vendor, Dr. Aloise's practice struggled to collect quality data and didn't attest to Meaningful Use, leaving incentive payments on the table. With athenahealth, quality reporting is now simple and financially rewarding. "In this day and age, you must provide quality care in order to get paid," says Dr. Aloise.

At a Glance

- Located in North Fort Myers, Florida, since 2001
- Live on athenaOne since 2014
- Solo family medicine practice with one physician's assistant
- About 50 patient visits per day

Solution

- athenaOne®:
- athenaClinicals®
- athenaCollector®
- athenaCommunicator®
- athenaCoordinator®

Issues

- Struggling to collect timely and full payment
- Time-consuming administrative tasks
- Inefficient clinical workflow took away from patient care
- Difficulty participating in quality programs

Results

- Collections increased 30 percent
- No-show rate down to 1.2 percent
- DAR reduced from 45 to 19 days
- Streamlined clinical workflow and reduced administrative work
- Significantly increased Medicare incentive payment

"With athenahealth, I have a network of experts on our side. They call patients for us, collect patient balances and insurance balances. I feel like I have a whole army of collectors trying to bring money into our practice for us."

— Tia Melot, practice manager

"athenahealth does all of the footwork for us. They remind us what has to be done during each encounter, and where we can improve. That has increased our revenue considerably." So far, the practice has earned \$90,000 in quality payments—and counting—with athena's support.

The quality team at athenahealth eases the administrative burden of reporting—like identifying appropriate programs and submitting data on the practice's behalf—so clinicians can focus on giving patients the best care possible.

"athena has built all the quality metrics we need right into the EHR," says Ms. Cherenek-Randall. "It's fantastic. The Quality Tab helps us keep track of patient screenings. Patients are getting the care they need and they're not missing anything important."

As the industry continues to evolve, reimbursement rules are becoming even more complex. So practices need EHR and practice management services that help them adapt to change without added cost or downtime.

"Quality is very, very important and it's going to become even more important in the future," says Ms. Melot. "The quality team at athenahealth is helping us stay ahead of industry change."

Reducing Administrative Work

"From check-in to checkout, athenahealth helps us reduce our administrative burden," says Ms. Melot. "We used to spend hours each day calling 1-800-MEDICARE and checking websites to verify benefits. With athena checking our eligibility and benefits for us, it frees up front office staff to help with patient care and other projects."

"With athenahealth, we have the tools to work more effectively," says Ms. Cherenek-Randall. "Everything is automatically scanned and loaded into the chart. That has freed up a lot of staff time with charting. The information is right there when you need it."

"By reducing our paperwork, automating our workflows, and giving us tremendous financial growth, athenahealth helps us offer the best care to our patients, who are like family to us," says Ms. Melot. "That's what our practice is all about."

athenaOne includes live and automated communication services that streamline interactions with patients. "Our no-shows have dropped to 1.2 percent," says Ms. Melot. "That's because of athenahealth's reminder calls two days before each appointment, which also gives patients the opportunity to change or cancel their appointment."

"Before athena, we were manually handling our call campaigns, from scheduling wellness visits to cancer screening reminders," explains Ms. Melot. "With athenaCommunicator, [the patient engagement service included in athenaOne], we automate all those calls. And the more patients we can reach to schedule wellness visits, the healthier our patients are going to be."

athenahealth has also helped the practice optimize staffing. "We used to have a staff position dedicated to reminder calls and pulling faxes," explains Ms. Melot. "Thanks to athena, I was able to reassign one staff member to more meaningful work. She's much happier. She has a much more important role in the office, which has helped team morale overall."

Dr. Aloise is pleased with the new efficiency of his staff. "My staff has benefitted from athena because it cuts down their workload considerably and it makes the day go by much easier for them," he says. "We're all happier now that we have a system that works well for the practice."

"An Army of Support"

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In addition to the financial and clinical benefits of athenaOne, Ms. Melot explains she can run the practice more effectively. "athenahealth has allowed me to be the best practice manager I can be. I can spend more time helping our small practice be successful."

"athena has helped us with our growth and quality of care," says Dr. Aloise. "They've really been there for us, giving us more time to spend with our patients. And if you can devote more time to your patients, you can be a better doctor."



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