

CASE STUDY

Paragon Sports Medicine

Atlanta, GA

Start-up Success: Integrated Approach Helps New Practice Thrive Quickly, with Low Overhead Costs

Dr. Ched Garten knew exactly what he wanted when he set out to start his own sports medicine practice in the spring of 2016. "It got to the point in my career when I wanted to just do my own thing, form my own brand, be my own boss, and have control of my destiny," says Dr. Garten, who had worked at two orthopedic practices before, the largest with 30 employees.

In pursuing his own endeavor, he says, "I wanted to stay small, because I think where a lot of physicians go wrong with start-ups is getting lost in overhead cost. So by staying small, I can really control my overhead cost and maximize profit margins."

Off to a Fast Start

Since Dr. Garten knew what he wanted, he honed in on the decisions that would bring his vision for Paragon Sports Medicine to life. When he was choosing a location for the practice, he kept it compact at 1,600 square feet. "As one physician, I can only see so many patients at a time, so I didn't need nine exam rooms and a big waiting room," he says. "We made everything very streamlined."

In keeping with his economical approach to the space, he also knew right away he wanted his practice to be paperless. "I wanted to minimize the need for storage for files as much as we could," he says.

Interest in a cloud-based solution was one reason Dr. Garten chose to partner with athenahealth, but just as appealing was the convenience of having medical records, revenue cycle management, and patient engagement services "all under one roof, instead of having to deal with different vendors and different locations," he says. It was not only the most efficient, but also the best value.

Comparing it to the vendors he used at his previous practice, "athena was still a better rate than what I was getting from a previous company, and had more to offer for that rate," he says. "Having an all-in-one package streamlined it. It was cost effective."

It took Dr. Garten about six months of diligent work to get his practice up and running, and once he decided to partner with athenahealth, he wanted to keep moving at the same fast pace. His onboarding specialist at athenahealth "help[ed] us get ready to roll" in only four weeks, he says. "She did a great job, and she helped us get ready in a short period of time."

At a Glance

- 1 physician
- 1 full-time technician
- 2 full-time staff
- Founded in September 2016
- Only non-surgical sports medicine solo practice in Atlanta

Issues

- Sought low up-front costs to get started and wanted to keep overhead low
- Needed to collect timely payment to start bringing in revenue
- Had to build and maintain a customer base by satisfying new patients
- Required a solution that would get the practice up and running quickly

Results

- 100% same-day encounter close rate
- 15 days in accounts receivable for patient self-pay
- Maintaining a full schedule—and work-life balance
- Earning a profit within the first six months

"athena allowed me to get the practice off the ground for a minimal cost."

— Dr. Ched Garten, Owner, Paragon Sports Medicine

Paragon was able to get started with athenahealth without delay, and the business took off quickly as well. "Fortunately, I've collected from day one," says Dr. Garten, adding that athenahealth "allowed me to get the practice off the ground for a minimal cost." And with no ongoing maintenance fees, Dr. Garten can avoid incurring additional unnecessary overhead costs as his practice grows.

The Right Information at the Right Time—with Less Work

Once they got started with athenahealth, Paragon saw efficiencies in other areas, as well. At her previous practice, practice manager Jay Sturm says, "I spent a good amount of time going through faxes and figuring out what needed to be returned and what needed to be filed in patients' charts. I would have a stack of papers on my desk until I could borrow the scanner from the girls up front to be able to put all that into the patients' charts."

athenahealth takes over Paragon's fax line and processes all incoming faxes, including digitizing results and tying them to the appropriate order in the patient chart. "Now, I can find the fax in no time and everything's uploaded so nothing gets lost," she says.

Having everything easily accessible on a cloud-based network helps Dr. Garten care for patients, too. "I can access it from my phone, wherever I need to pull something up," he says. He can even prescribe medication electronically, instead of generating paper prescriptions that patients have to pick up in the office. "I can prescribe narcotics from home if somebody had a procedure and they're sore and they need medication."

As a small start-up, Paragon staff need to be able to put their hands on the right information quickly and easily to provide patients the customer service that will encourage them to return. For Ms. Sturm, that's easy to accomplish with athenahealth's comprehensive services. "If a patient's on the phone with our front desk and is asking a billing question, I can pull it up in the same system with no issue, and it's very streamlined and explanatory," she says.

"I can tell why they owe their balance, or why their claim hasn't been processed, or if it was resubmitted. I can do all of that at the drop of a hat."

More importantly, Ms. Sturm has access to billing expertise that allows her to get claims processed more accurately and easily. With all it takes to keep up with a busy practice, she may only have an hour or two in her day to manage billing work. The continuously updated knowledge in athenahealth's Billing Rules Engine means she doesn't have to spend that limited time trying to keep up with changing payer rules. For example, she says, "Humana requires right versus left modifiers. I had no clue, but it bounced back every single time." athenaNet prompts her to resubmit claims that don't meet payers' requirements. "Having that happen is fantastic for my everyday workflow," she says.

A Busy Practice and a Balanced Life

With easy access to the information they need, Paragon can see more patients and keep them satisfied. One day after Ms. Sturm had left the office, Dr. Garten's wife texted her to ask if she could fit in an appointment for a friend. "In less than two minutes, I was able to offer an appointment time that fit her schedule," says Ms. Sturm. "She even said it was the fastest she had ever heard back from somebody."

As a practice manager, Ms. Sturm has found athenahealth a valuable partner. "My role is to make [Dr. Garten's] life easy and productive throughout the day," she says. "And that's what athena allows me to be able to do. It allows me to have whatever information I need to answer any question that he may have, and also to make the business work."

Dr. Garten, meanwhile, has been able to focus on ensuring his practice thrives in its first six months. "It's successful and we're busy and we're booking out. The schedule's full, and we have collections coming in," he says. "I think people enjoy working here. I think they have a good balance of work and life, and I try to have that balance for myself. It's been very satisfying to see that, as well."



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