

**FEATURES**

## The Paperless Practice

**Converting management operations from manual to electronic delivers quantifiable benefits.**

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**Management**

As healthcare continues to experience a shift from manual record management to electronic practice management systems, owners of private physical therapy practices are finding newfound ease and success in day-to-day operations. By using desktop software, client-server software and Internet-based software, information can now be more efficiently stored and managed than ever before.

Many practitioners are realizing that they require this technology to fully achieve their business goals. Additionally, moving to an electronic practice management system allows practices and therapists to engage in more efficient documentation processes, permitting them more time to focus on their primary concern – patient health. It also supports access to more data features, higher-quality data, and greater analytic power.

"An up-to-date and robust practice management system can assist a physical therapy practice to design efficient workflows that will mitigate errors, resulting in on-time reimbursement. However, a system is only as good as the preparation, setup and data entered," noted Sunni Patterson, president and CEO at RMK Holdings Inc. in Barrington, Ill. RMK Holdings offers medical billing services, revenue management services, collection agency services, medical and hospital bill review, data entry services, and electronic health records services.



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## Financial Organization

Although private practice owners seek to provide the services necessary to establish a profitable business, some lack the technological resources to achieve such a high level of financial stability. Thus, implementing an electronic practice management system can enhance a practice's lucrativeness through increased efficiency in billing, reimbursement, documentation, and collection processes.

These systems guide practitioners by flagging inefficiencies, which can help a practice avoid the problem of missing reports and resulting penalties. When dealing with finances by hand, there is no way to be alerted of these faults, making electronic practice records increasingly beneficial.

"Our billing is outsourced, but with web-based billing software I can audit what is being done on my account from anywhere/anytime," conveyed Patrick Labelle, DC, CCSP, CKTP, FMS-1, president and chiropractic sports physician at BioMechanics Sport Rehabilitation and Chiropractic in Chicago. "Also, one of the biggest annoyances with outsourced billing (before web-based billing solutions were common) was not being able to answer the patient's account/billing questions on the spot. We used to have to call or e-mail the billing company to get up-to-the-minute status on a particular patient account."

Through a digital presence, practices can also manage documentation to show higher-level granular details on charges, such as what payments have been accepted, what's withdrawn from bank accounts, and all electronic fund transfers.

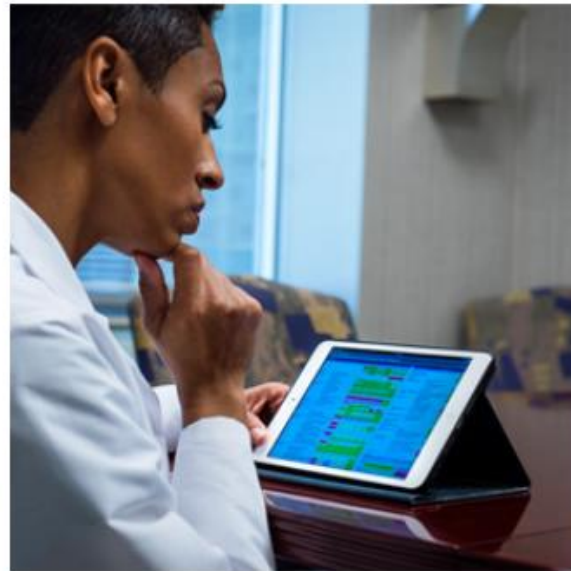
Additionally, digital software can allow a practice to look at revenue-per-visit and revenue-per-unit, which helps distinguish accepting insurance companies and payers. Typically, to determine the amount by which revenue from sales exceeds costs, practices will lean toward the commoditization of network providers who accept the lowest payments, and will base their payment acceptance on these terms.

Above all, organizing finances electronically can reduce time that would otherwise be spent completing the same workload on paper. However, despite the reduction in time expended, electronic documentation must be established in a way that supports billing, and should be performed within the logic of the platform in use. Guidelines that can be written in the software help guide practices in accurately billing for what they do, using measures to prohibit both under- and overbilling, thus becoming more compliant.

## Patient Scheduling

By leveraging an intuitive practice management system, clinicians are able to streamline patient scheduling and management. Integrated scheduling systems that link appointments directly to progress notes, automated coding, and management claims are all made possible through these sophisticated systems.

"Through the use of mobile responsive scheduling software, PTs can access their schedules from anywhere to maximize their time spent in the clinic. So, having a digital scheduling platform helps efficiency vs. the paper alternative that no one else can see," explained Heidi Jannenga, co-founder and president of WebPT, an electronic medical record for physical therapists. "It helps PTs to use time more efficiently and better understand their scheduling limitations."



These systems also help a practice grow by making sure all appointment slots are filled. Through access to practice schedules virtually anywhere, therapists can maintain an increased awareness of cancellations and no-shows. This can help them schedule their time accordingly, making room for tasks they would otherwise not be able to fit into a full schedule.

Additionally, for owners of multi-location practices, electronic management allows receptionists to pull up the schedule of any provider, at any location. This benefits the practice and adds to patient convenience – no matter which office a client calls, he will be able to schedule appointments according to specific need.

## Data Storage and Analytics

Through electronic management practices, easier [centralized chart management](#) can save therapists a great amount of time. Condition-specific queries and other shortcuts also increase data storage efficiency and cut down the time it takes to organize such information.

"[Electronic practice management] can be a huge time-saver and, depending on the platform, it can track critical metrics and look at overall business performance," explained Sturdy McKee, MPT, CEO of San Francisco Sport and Spine Physical Therapy. "This technology means we no longer have to download business under metrics information and put it into a spreadsheet. Instead, the technology is like a blood panel or lab test -- it tells you what your ranges are, and if something's out of range, you know what to focus on next."

Along with better data storage techniques, storing information more efficiently can enhance communication with other clinicians, labs and health plans. This process is enhanced through easy access to patient information from anywhere, through the ability to track all electronic messages, and through automated formulary checks by health plans, according to HealthIT.gov.

Electronic practice management offers streamlined standardization, data aggregation, web-based practice management techniques, and the overall ability to collect data. It has given therapists the ability to compare success rates of practicing therapists and to benchmark patient satisfaction, outcomes, and insight into how the entire profession is doing.

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Data tracking through digital services also monitors conversion rates, tracking to determine whether patients who schedule appointments keep them. Furthermore, these systems monitor new patients and determine whether they were successful in getting in for their appointments. With new patients, it's important that the reason for their referral be documented in their digital file; otherwise, therapists must essentially start at square one.

Insurance companies that have previously been able to compare practices based only on claims data and demographics are now able to accept information regarding patient data, range of motion, outcomes, and other data for comparison.

When searching for an appropriate electronic practice management vendor, seek one with which you can work long-term. This service requires a careful decision -- it's not just a one-time purchase. Partner with a service that can adequately manage the administrative functions of your practice, so you can focus on patient treatment.

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