

Technology and Productivity

These foundations are needed to allow a practice to grow and thrive.

BY RANDY CARBONE

Tips from the Trenches is a new every-issue column featuring practice management issues, and written exclusively for PM by members of the Institute for Podiatric Excellence and Development (IPED). IPED's mission is to motivate, inspire and synergistically bridge the gap between students, residents, new practitioners, and seasoned veterans in the field of podiatric medicine. They are committed to the idea that mentors with passion to share and mentees eager to learn make a powerful combination that allows IPED to bring and renew a full life to podiatric physicians, their practices and their well-being throughout the U.S. and beyond.

There are many different components that go into making a podiatry practice a success. These days, the right technology can help you be more productive and improve the practice quality of life. Let's take a look at what can be used to take a practice to the next level.

HIPAA Compliance

First and foremost, there's HIPAA compliance. HIPAA is not going to go away, and practices need to have a trained staff. Everyone must understand how to protect personal health information (PHI). Computers can keep your data safe, but if users disclose information in improper ways, no technology can prevent a breach from happening.

Up-to-Date Hardware

You also need to have up-to-date computer hardware and software. Older equipment and software is not only slow and suffers from security risks, it is also more expensive to support and difficult to repair in case of a failure. Most hardware companies support their systems with replacement parts for three years. Intel Corporation has a few high-end systems that they maintain for five years, but other than that, in case of emergency,

performance in only seven inches of space and can even be mounted under a desk or on the back of your monitor! There is nothing to kick under your desk or to pile papers on. More desk space is always a bonus.

Dual Monitors

Monitors are inexpensive. Always consider using large ones, or even two monitors, with your systems. Research by Microsoft has demonstrated that two screens can increase pro-

A three-year old computer is sixty years old in human terms.

eBay may be the only place to hopefully locate parts. Not having access to parts that can rapidly remediate a hardware problem only leads to lost productivity and lost money.

When considering upgrades to your current computer hardware, consider that new models perform 60% faster than a three-year-old similar model. A generation to a computer is a year and a half. A three-year-old computer is sixty years old in human terms. Also, keep in mind that computer manufacturers make their computers to meet price points. A business-grade system that will fit the needs of most practices will be in the \$500 to \$1,000 range before software, monitors, and accessories. The tower and desktop computers are still the norm, but there are tiny computers that have the same

productivity between 9% and 50%. At the very least, a large screen allows for more room for multiple windows and the manipulation of data.

Remote Access Services

Another technology that will improve the productivity of your practice is using some type of remote access services. An industry favorite because it can be controlled and secured by your IT staff is Microsoft Remote Desktop Services. This service provides a full featured "desktop" that users can access from anywhere. It allows work to be done anytime. Doctors can finish their charting and they don't have to be in the office. This keeps data centralized and secure. Access can be grant-

Continued on page 56

TIPS FROM THE TRENCHES

Technology & Productivity (from page 55)

ed or revoked based on many different controls. It is also a way to re-use older technology, where appropriate, because it only requires minimal resources on the local computer. All the processing is done on the server.

Records Management

The next thing you will want to look at is record management. Let's face it, patient files take up space. Current EMR software allows you to attach all of those papers to the computer record. There are many varieties of reliable scanners out there that work with many different platforms. As with computer systems, consider something that is business grade. Scanners should be designed to scan at least 20 pages per minute and be TWAIN-compliant.

TWAIN is an industry standard that allows the scanner to function across a variety of platforms and uses. Consider Fujitsu and Ambir for your scanner choice. They both make excellent products. Once all of your files are scanned, they should be included as part of your back-up procedure as well.

Use Secure E-Mail

Many doctor's offices still use Gmail, AOL and Yahoo for their business email accounts. These public or free email services are not secure or HIPAA-compliant. Using a Microsoft Exchange-based email service like Office 365 can protect your email and allow you to converse freely with everyone in your practice. All emails can

and office staff: how do they reach you quickly and securely? Did you know that text messaging is not HIPAA-compliant or secure? Secure messaging is another way to really improve productivity. You can chat/text, share files, share your screen, and use full video. You can discuss patient in-

formation, collaborate, and diagnose securely. It is another feature available from companies that provide the Office 365 suite of services.

formation, collaborate, and diagnose securely. It is another feature available from companies that provide the Office 365 suite of services.

formation, collaborate, and diagnose securely. It is another feature available from companies that provide the Office 365 suite of services.

Intelligent Business Continuity Plan

The final part in all of this preparation is an intelligent business continuity plan. It is critical to the survival of any company in case of a real disaster. You can easily find a new location, buy new medical equipment, and be ready to treat patients in short order, but what about your patients? Who has appointments? Where are the records? How quickly can you get access to your data from whatever product you are using to back it up?

Current business continuity plans can recreate your server and data in an emergency cloud environment and get you back to work in under an hour. It should be on any practice's short list of things to discuss with their IT provider.

those gaps in your schedule with continuing, preventative, and maintenance care. Automated appointment reminders keep people on time and result in lower missed appointment rates. Email campaigns can inform your clients of new products or services.

Content Is King

One of the most important things you can do is to keep your Facebook and website content fresh and up-to-date. Nothing is worse than a website blog or Facebook page that has not had an update in a year. Newsletters, both print and email, keep your clients aware of your company and also serve as reminders for preventative care. Patient reviews serve to install confidence in your services for prospective as well as current patients. Implementing all of these items can be daunting and take a full-time employee. There are services and companies available to help practices perform these functions for a low monthly fee.

Technology can enhance your practice, but only if it is up-to-date and utilized properly. **PM**

Scanners should be designed to scan at least 20 pages per minute and be TWAIN-compliant.

be archived forever, and services even have the option to allow you to send secure email to your patients. The excuse has been made, "we don't discuss PHI via email and we don't email patients." Accidents will happen and violations will occur. Don't chance it; put the proper systems in place.

Secure Messaging

For those of you with partners

Social Networking

So, we have done all of this work preparing and we have an incredible practice setup and are ready to go. Now what? If the phone doesn't ring and patients aren't making appointments, none of it does you any good. Don't forget to use patient engagement and social networking for your practice. Patient engagement is defined as any form of communication with the



Randy Carbone is the owner of RC Computers, LLC, and has been providing professional IT services in the NY tri-state area since 1986. Randy successfully works with small businesses to create technology solutions that increase productivity. He holds a BS from Drexel University in Technology Information Systems as well as certifications from Microsoft, Cisco, and AVG. Randy is a member of the IT Industry ASCII Group and Rotary International.