WHILE MEDICAL Scribe UTILIZATION DATES BACK TO THE 1970s, THE STEADY ADOPTION OF ELECTRONIC HEALTH RECORDS OVER THE PAST DECADE HAS RAPIDLY INCREASED THE PROMINENCE OF SCRIBES ACROSS ALL FIELDS OF MEDICINE.

Medical scribes contribute to increased physician productivity and job satisfaction, as well as improved revenue capture and patient-clinician interactions. In primary care, where physician burnout can be significant, the use of scribes has proven particularly beneficial. Medical scribes, who are trained to support healthcare providers through medical documentation and administrative support, can save time and add value to patient relationships.

These benefits are clearly evident at an award winning nonprofit healthcare system*, based in Minneapolis, Minnesota. The 22,000 employee system, which includes six hospitals and 40+ primary care facilities staffed by 400 primary care physicians began its partnership with Elite Medical Scribes in 2011 and has since expanded scribe coverage dramatically. In fact, in 2016, the health system’s leadership team decided to implement a medical scribe program system-wide on an elective basis. As has been proven at numerous other health systems, utilization of scribes improved the bottom line, as well as significantly increased patient satisfaction due to less wait time and greater engagement with their clinician. The following case study highlights initial success stories from the perspective of physicians, an administrator and a medical scribe.

ELITE SERVICE EXPANSION AT THE HEALTH SYSTEM

2011: 112 SCRIBE HOURS per week

2016: 2,700 SCRIBE HOURS per week

THE CASE FOR SCRIBES IN PRIMARY CARE

Within primary care, the level of physician burnout and the challenges in hiring new clinicians are high. These market realities led the health system to experiment with medical scribes. Scribes have alleviated the burden of documentation on physicians, decreased the amount of time spent documenting patient interactions by 75 percent, and enhanced visits by allowing for more preparation and focus throughout. These benefits were something even the Family Medicine physician and Vice President of Medical Practice said she didn’t foresee.

Longer term, scribes will allow for even more comprehensive visits. Initial indicators suggest that the patient quality outcome metrics that the system tracks will also increase over time. Physician workload and staff satisfaction are improving too with the incorporation of medical scribes. Scribes have proven to be a cost-effective means of helping reduce physician burnout, plus increased productivity more than covers the investment. In fact, studies have shown that it only takes seeing an additional one to two patients a day to offset the scribe investment - something that is typically covered by the health system or shared with clinicians.

In this case, the health system had considered developing a homegrown scribe program. After learning the complexity of recruitment, specialty-specific training, quality assurance, compliance, and ongoing management, they opted to bring in a professional solution via Elite Medical Scribes.

Practice leaders also had questioned whether having another person in the exam room would present issues within such a relational field of medicine. In reality, incorporating scribes into the Family Medicine setting proved very effective and was embraced by patients who highly value facetime with their clinicians. A study conducted by another health system in Minnesota found that fewer than one percent of patients prefer not to have a scribe as part of the care team. Elite Medical Scribes continues to enhance and customize training to meet the health system’s unique needs.

* Name withheld with respect to confidentiality agreements
Utilizing medical scribes is one of five innovations used in high-functioning Primary Care practices, contributing to greater physician satisfaction and productivity.

THE SCRIBE-PHYSICIAN RELATIONSHIP

In addition to his certification as a paramedic, the scribe assigned to the health system’s clinician initially applied to become a scribe to boost his educational opportunities. By the time he moves on to medical school, he will have logged more than 1,000 hours scribing alongside the Family Medicine physician, and have become a senior medical scribe.

It didn’t take long for the two to establish a seamless partnership that brought immediate benefits to the physician and her patients. For the first time in more than 30 years of practicing medicine, she can leave the office just after 5 p.m. with fully completed charts. What’s more, she is able to see four to five more patients a day and deliver more engaging care through increased eye contact and decreased multitasking. This return on investment is significant, both short-term and long-term, for her practice and the health system as a whole.

From both the scribe and the physician’s perspectives, the patients welcome a scribe as part of their care team. They realize that additional professional assistance contributes to a more efficient and effective visit, and appreciate receiving detailed after-visit summaries before they leave the clinic. Their relationship is preparing the scribe for his future in medicine, providing more enjoyable work for the physician, and resulting in more accurate notes and attentive care for satisfied patients.

"CONTINUITY OF CARE IS MUCH MORE STREAMLINED WITH A SCRIBE. IN TWO OR THREE YEARS, SCRIBES WILL BE THE STANDARD OF CARE."

– Family Medicine physician

PREVENTING PHYSICIAN BURNOUT

The need for scribes became clear to a physician in Family Medicine and Pediatric Care, when he realized patients equate personal interaction with the quality of care. The need to enter data into a computer competes with that time – and can decrease patient satisfaction.

Physicians obviously place a high priority on accurate and comprehensive charting. It can become frustrating and exhausting to switch back and forth from charting to patient care – signing in and out, finding previous notes, determining the template for each medical problem, etc.

With a scribe, physicians are able to go in at the start of the day to review pertinent histories of patients scheduled, instead of focusing on a growing list of administrative work. In addition, there is more time for phone calls regarding lab results and fewer off-hour demands for chart completion.

Scribes, of course, are not trained to, nor are they trying to, solve medical problems. They manage the flow of information, allowing physicians to focus on helping their patients.

According to some studies, as high as 30 percent of Primary Care physicians ages 35 to 49 – and 52 percent of those over age 50 – plan to leave their practices within five years. As is the case here, Elite Medical Scribes is helping address this situation by enhancing the quality of patient care and physician work-life balance.
ABOUT ELITE MEDICAL SCRIBES

Elite Medical Scribes is the nation’s preeminent provider of the highest quality medical scribe services for healthcare systems, physician groups, and independent practices. Our services address the unique needs of more than 30 medical specialties - including Family Medicine, helping clinicians increase productivity, optimize reimbursement, and improve physician and patient satisfaction.

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