WHAT IS EHEALTH & MHEALTH?

...And Why Your Practice Needs Them
Today’s busy medical practices are one of the most fast-paced work environments of the 21st century. From greeting patients who come in the door, checking insurance forms, answering the telephone, making patient appointments and getting patients ready to see the doctor, medical staff have a host of responsibilities.

As health insurance continues to change and medical practices continue to grow, more patients are being seen than ever before. Managers and owners are struggling to meet the demand that a high volume practice can bring, and ensuring that there are enough staff members to meet the needs of patients and doctors alike can be difficult.

Many practices assume that the most productive solution is to hire more staff, however, with wage increases and a higher cost of living, this can cut deep into the bottom line. More staff isn’t necessarily the answer - in fact, electronic health and mobile health have provided busy medical practices with a significant increase in productivity at an exceptionally reasonable cost. Staff members are freed up from many time consuming tasks, allowing them to focus more on patient care while the patient is in the office.

What Is Mobile Health?

Patients are online now more than ever before. Today’s generation of adults and teens are using mobile devices such as tablet computers and smartphones to stay connected via the Internet. This means that the best way to reach them is not with a phone call to their home phone - in fact, many people no longer have a landline. The best way to reach your patients is to connect with them in a way that works with their active lifestyles. Mobile health describes the practice of medicine and public health supported by mobile devices.

Mobile health utilizes emails, text messaging and phone calls to reach patients of fast paced medical practices. It can be completely customized to the needs of each individual practice, allowing practice managers and owners to achieve maximum productivity.
What Can You Do With eHealth & Mobile Health?

There are many ways you can use electronic health to make a positive impact on your practice as a whole, including:

CONFIRMING APPOINTMENTS

Text messaging is one of the easiest and most reliable ways to confirm patient appointments in today’s technological age. For patients, confirming their appointment is as simple as texting back "Y" or "N" - and an "N" answer will prompt the doctor’s office to call back and reschedule.

In the past, confirming an appointment was a matter of having a staff member call each patient scheduled for each doctor on a particular day. More often than not, a message needed to be left, which is rarely returned. For doctors, this meant an unpredictable schedule the next day. With few confirmed appointments, many patients would come in late or not at all.

Now with text confirmations, it's easy for patients to respond. The texts are completely automated and sent out in bulk to patients one to two days before their appointments, or whenever the practice prefers. Automated emails and voice messages can also be set up as appointment reminders.

MISSED APPOINTMENT NOTIFICATIONS

If a patient misses an appointment, eHealth allows a practice to easily contact them to notify them of a missed appointment, and most importantly, gives them a prompt to reschedule. Many patients are unaware that they have missed their appointment, and without notification, they are highly likely to not reschedule.

This scenario can not only cost practices significant time and money, but can also affect a patient's overall health outcome. When getting patients who have missed an appointment back in the office is crucial to both patient care and the practice's bottom line, eHealth is an effective, affordable solution.

DELIVERING LAB RESULTS

Many high volume practices have a number of patients that are due to receive lab results on any given day. Often, this is just a matter of contacting a patient to let them know their lab work was normal, or that their doctor wants to schedule a follow up appointment to discuss the results.

Having staff members to do this manually can be quite costly, especially if a practice does a great deal of lab work on a daily basis. Mobile health can send automated emails, texts or voice messages that can be customized to the needs of the practice. This keeps more staff members available to work with patients, reducing each patient’s wait time and improving the overall flow of the practice.

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REMININDING PATIENTS ABOUT PAST DUE BALANCES

Accounting is an integral part of every medical practice, but can often be overlooked in terms of how to increase productivity and reduce overhead costs. Mobile health can be implemented in this area of the health care field as well, in order to automatically notify patients of past due balances, insurance payments and more.

NOTIFY PATIENTS OF PRESCRIPTIONS THAT NEED TO BE PICKED UP

Many practices have in-house prescriptions or products that they provide for their patients, such as an optometrist providing their patients' eyeglasses, or dentists who make dentures, partials and other dental products for their patients. When these items are ready to be picked up, staff members need to take time out from other important tasks to let patients know their items are available.

For many practices, especially those that stay open later in the evening with just one or two staff members, this can be difficult to do. Mobile health and eHealth makes notifying patients that a prescription or product needs to be picked up simple. Automated text messages or emails reach clients online or on their smartphones, where they are most likely going to be.

CUSTOM MESSAGES FOR EVERY PRACTICE

Mobile health software can easily be integrated with a practice's current patient management software, or even accessed from any personal computer. Email, text and voice messages can be completely customized to suit a practice's needs, including adding the doctor's name, notifying patients of early arrival suggestions, and providing patients with special instructions for their appointment.

The ability to customize mobile health messaging alleviates much of the concern that automated messages reduces the personal contact a practice has with their patients. Special announcements about the practice can be sent via mobile health messaging, and eHealth software even has the capability to send happy birthday messages to patients.

THERE WILL BE MORE THAN 196 MILLION SMARTPHONE USERS IN THE U.S. BY THE YEAR 2016².
What About HIPAA?

With any medical practice, patient privacy is a top priority. Fortunately, electronic medicine and mobile health make it easy for you to continue abiding by HIPAA standards for privacy and security when communicating with patients using automated software.

A Condensed View of HIPAA Privacy Rule (45 CFR § 164.500 ff)

• The HIPAA Privacy Rule applies to all forms of protected health information—written, oral, or electronic.

• The HIPAA Privacy Rule allows health care providers to communicate with patients about their care, including providing appointment reminders.

• Communicating with patients includes communicating by phone, mail, or other methods, including leaving messages on answering machines. (For disclosure to a family member or relative, the patient must generally be informed in advance of the use or disclosure of the information and be given the opportunity to agree or reject the use or disclosure. The agreement may be oral.)

• If messages are left on answering machines, health care providers should limit the amount of information to only what is necessary to confirm the appointment, or simply leave a message asking the patient to call back.

• Health care providers are required to give patients notices of their privacy practices, and may include in the notice that the provider may contact the patient to provide appointment reminders or other information about treatment.

• Health care providers must allow individuals to request that they receive communications of protected health information by alternative means, or at alternative locations, and the health care provider must accommodate reasonable requests of this type.

• Health care providers must have appropriate administrative, technical, and physical safeguards in place to protect the privacy of protected health information.
Are You Ready to Make the Change?

Electronic health is changing the field of healthcare one practice at a time, and can provide you with an easy, effective way to reach your patients for a variety of purposes. Instead of dedicating costly man hours to tasks like confirming patient appointments or contacting patients to pick up prescriptions, eHealth allows you to complete these tasks efficiently, while saving time and money.

Staff members will be freed up to offer patients who are in the office with personal attention and better care, helping each patient to have the best experience possible in your office. Then, keep in contact with your patients through appointment reminders, prescription pick up notices and special messages.

Take the first step to revolutionizing your practice by integrating eHealth and mobile health software into your practice today. It’s an affordable, efficient way to reduce overhead costs while simultaneously increasing the practice’s bottom line.

ABOUT US

PhoneTree® has been helping people connect for 25 years with automated communication solutions. Our HealthWave® and HealthWave Connect™ product lines help increase practice profitability by providing technology for personalized patient connection using phone, text, and email messaging. PhoneTree products offer seamless integration with many practice management software systems and provide a direct line of communication to your practice’s network of patients to help improve patient outcomes.

SOURCES:
