

Keeping Up on the Technology Speedway

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BY KIPER C. NELSON, MD

Since Hermann Snellen first published his famous letter chart in 1862, 20/20 has been considered the optimal goal for visual acuity. The continuing evolution of laser technology and wavefront aberrometry, however, has made it possible to take many of our patients beyond 20/20 visual acuity. Similar to the devices and apps we have adopted in our personal lives, an array of programs allows us to apply digital technology to the management of our practices. New technologies of any kind can represent large financial investments, but a conscious decision to stay up to date on the latest developments can bring tangible benefits.

JUMPING ON NEW TECHNOLOGY

As soon as a new technology or procedure has proven itself, my partners and I work diligently to incorporate it into our practice so that we can offer our patients the best. Southern Eye Center was the first practice in the state to perform blade-free LASIK and blade-free cataract surgery. Although other techniques for cataract and refractive surgery achieved good results, myriad studies have shown that femtosecond laser-assisted procedures increase patients' comfort and produce better, more consistent results.¹ We have also adopted the latest imaging and diagnostic equipment such as spectral-domain optical coherence tomography, wavefront imaging, and laser biometry, which enable us to make more appropriate decisions regarding treating and monitoring diseases.

ELECTRONIC HEALTH RECORDS

New technology is not limited to medical equipment. Patients' education, office management, and electronic health records (EHRs) have all changed dramatically during the past few years. We adopted the ManagementPlus EHR system (ManagementPlus, Inc.) in December 2009 and have worked to integrate every aspect of our practice into the electronic system. We have devoted significant resources to hardware, software, and information technology personnel so that our clinic, LASIK center, and ambulatory surgical center could be seamlessly connected and entirely paperless. All divisions have access to patients' information, and coding and billing are automated with pertinent information automatically shared (see *Tips on Selecting an EHR System*).

There is a major movement toward mobile technology,² and ophthalmology is being carried along with the crowd. We have replaced the manner of record keeping and our system for obtaining records. We provide tablet devices so that patients can enter their history and demographic information directly into the EHR system, and we use tablets for patients' education as well. Our electronic system allows us to access medical records when we are not in the office as well as text appointment reminders directly to our patients' cell phones.

WHAT WE HAVE GAINED

The benefits of adopting the latest technologies are both personal and financial. It is professionally satisfying to work
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TIPS ON SELECTING AN EHR SYSTEM

The most basic requirement is that an electronic health record (EHR) program meet the government's requirements for meaningful use, and most systems do. Look for an EHR platform that is adaptable and meets the specific needs of your practice. In the health care arena, ophthalmology is just a small slice of the pie. The ManagementPlus EHR system (ManagementPlus, Inc.) is ophthalmology specific. My colleagues and I have found it interfaces with all of our diagnostic equipment and lasers as well as our surgery and billing centers.

Unless someone already in your practice is computer savvy, I recommend investing in some technical support to work alongside the software provider. Continual tweaks and adjustments to the EHR software will allow your practice to achieve the maximum benefit and efficiency from it.

with excellent tools and to know that we are providing the best outcomes possible to our patients. This is the primary motivation for any investment. Second, it is simply good business. Blade-free refractive surgeries are considered to be more precise, eliminating many complications associated with traditional surgeries, and this saves the physician valuable time. Our EHR system provides a similar benefit: our staff does not have to transcribe or scan information from other sources, and the LASIK center is not duplicating work the clinic already completed. All diagnostic test results are integrated into the electronic patient record and can be viewed quickly on the monitor in the lane, with the progression of optical conditions easily tracked.

We also find that a technologically advanced office makes a good impression on patients, contributing to the financial advantages. They appreciate our efficiency, feel greater confidence in a practice that is on the cutting edge, and are thrilled with their surgical results. All of these factors translate to more referrals.

DO NOT FALL BEHIND

Ophthalmology is constantly evolving. We decided to stay abreast of the latest advances, and we have reaped personal, professional, and financial benefits as a result. ■

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