



Patient Registration Station Gives 'Chart-Runners' a Breather

Electronic form and signature capture solution from Unicom adds efficient front-end to Amarillo Heart Group's PM and EMR systems

A Busy Cardiovascular Practice

For over 15 years, Amarillo Heart Group has provided comprehensive cardiovascular health care to the nearly half-million residents of Amarillo, Texas and the surrounding areas of the Texas Panhandle. Utilizing the most advanced diagnostic equipment and treatment technologies available today, its 175-person team of doctors, nurses and technicians deliver high quality health care while minimizing patient costs through a wide range of on-site services and outpatient options that reduce the need for hospital stays. Led by a team of 12 cardiologists, Amarillo Heart Group receives over 300 patients each day.

Amarillo Heart Group's technical infrastructure has to meet the demanding needs of an exceptionally busy practice that handles very complex medical records. It put a Practice Management (PM) system from Sage Software in place in 1994 and adopted an Electronic Medical Record (EMR) solution from Allscripts™ in 2005. The solutions delivered the expected efficiency benefits, but they also served to draw attention to the glaring contrast in inefficiencies of its patient registration procedures.

"Our PM and EMR systems were great for our back-end operations, but did little for automating the front-end," explained Ron Welty, Executive Director of Amarillo Heart Group. "We wanted to move to an all-digital system and finding a way to electronically capture patient signatures, forms and other documents was a key step in achieving our goal."

Evolving System in Need of a Front-End

Amarillo Heart Group uses seven patient check-in desks to handle the volume of patients it receives daily. As its PM and EMR infrastructure evolved, the new challenge it faced turned to finding a way to transform the paperwork-intensive manual procedures of patient registration into a system of

similar efficiency. They wanted something that could eliminate paperwork and photocopying while supporting the ability to capture patient signatures on documents, forms and financial agreements. They also wanted a more efficient way for staff to retrieve and share patient charts. And they wanted a solution that was cost-effective and easily integrated with their existing applications.

"Staff among different physician and billing departments need access to patient charts on an ad hoc daily basis, frequently with several needing a particular patient's chart at the same time," said Welty. "With a clinic as busy as ours, it was nothing to see 20 patient folders stacked on every desk. To keep it all straight, we had to devote three full-time people to do nothing but pull and run charts among the departments. The potential improvement that could be had by capturing the charts directly into our IT system was obvious."

An Elegantly Simple Solution

After looking at several alternatives, Amarillo Heart Group chose POWERsign™ and POWERscan™, two products which together comprise the "Patient Registration Station," an offering from Unicom Corp. of America. POWERsign and POWERscan are add-on software modules from Unicom's IMPOWER™ product suite.

POWERsign uses an electronic signature pad to capture patient signatures with forms displayed on a patient-facing monitor. HIPAA privacy notices, treatment consent forms, and other documents requiring patient signatures can all be captured and sealed together in legally binding digital format without the need to print and scan completed forms. POWERscan is a PC solution that allows the scanning of patient-provided documents such as photo IDs, insurance cards and doctor referrals directly into virtual patient folders and cabinets.

“We had been using Unicom’s IMPOWER AutoMatch™ software to process secondary claims for over five years. We had been very happy with both the product and our relationship with the people at Unicom,” said Welty. “When they showed us POWERsign and POWERscan we were eager to give it a try and confident it would be easy to use and perform well.”

It’s Made Our Lives Easier

Amarillo Heart Group installed POWERsign and POWERscan on two of its seven registration desks and tested it for three weeks. The solution met every expectation and was immediately rolled out to the remaining patient check-in desks.

The workflow improvements attributed to Unicom’s Patient Registration Station since its adoption cannot be overstated. Registrars find it easy to quickly capture into their PCs, without data entry error, everything they previously collected in paper form. The physical burden of manually filing patient charts has been eliminated. Access to charts is now instant on PCs without the need to search through cabinets or wait until other physicians or billing departments have finished with them.

“We’ve been using Patient Registration Station for over two years now. We have over 20 different people in different departments using it and its electronic filing system routinely every day. Being able to look at any patient chart at any time, no matter who else is looking at it, has made everyone’s life here a lot easier.”

“We couldn’t be more satisfied with how easily we transitioned to it. POWERsign and POWERscan installed and integrated so smoothly with our existing PM and EMR systems, and were so intuitive to use, that today we don’t even think about them as separate products. There’s absolutely no doubt that they’ve more than justified our investment in them,” concluded Welty. “The 20-high stacks of charts are gone from our desks and we’ve since reassigned our three ‘chart-runners’ to other, more productive jobs.”

About Unicom

Unicom Corp. of America (UCoA) specializes in developing cutting edge document management and productivity software tools for the healthcare industry. Its IMPOWER™ product suite can be added to any PM or EMR system and today is used by over 20,000 physicians in all types of practices and third party service companies in more than 35 states. With principals who average 30 years experience working with providers in the application of information technology to ‘real world’ requirements, Unicom’s success is proven every day by its customers’ increased profitability.

To learn more about IMPOWER products, call 800.771.1710 or visit www.UCoA.com