How DRM Group Helped Allied Health Associates Win Back Patients

Dwindling patient count prompted administrators to take action

320
New patients

43%
Increase in revenue

96%
Satisfaction rating

At a Glance

A drop in patient satisfaction levels, difficulties with the EHR system, and an outdated website led to a decrease in new and established patient visits.

Solutions

- Streamlined intake procedures
- In-depth training on EHR
- systems
- New website with improved
- patient portal
- Automated reminder system
- Staff mentorship

Results

- 40 new patients in the first month
- 60% increase in established patient return visits
- 5-minute wait time
- 96% patient satisfaction rating
- 43% increase in revenue

Challenges

Allied Health Associates Administrator Jenn Miller noticed a troubling trend at the internal medicine practice. After five years of steady growth, patient visits were declining.

"Both new and established patients weren't returning. "We needed to address the issues quickly before the practice suffered irreversible financial losses."

Miller suspected that the practice's problems were multifaceted. In the previous six months, Allied Health had lost a physician, a nurse practitioner, and two front office staff members. The remaining staff members juggled patient care responsibilities while learning a new electronic health record (EHR) system and training new employees.

"Although the EHR system offers many helpful features, it's so comprehensive that mastering it is difficult. Our staff was so busy reading online manuals that patient interactions began to suffer."

Patients clearly weren't happy with the changes, which saw them spending more time waiting to see a doctor or nurse practitioner. In fact, overall wait times jumped from 8 minutes to 21 minutes. Telephone hold times also increased as the remaining staff struggled to manage the call volume. Unfortunately, that often meant that appointment reminder calls weren't made – yet another reason for patient attrition.

A difficult-to-navigate website only compounded the practice's problems.

"Patients told us that they often got error messages when they tried to submit refill requests, make appointments, or ask basic questions via the portal," Miller says. *"Instead of helping us, the website made our lives more difficult."*

Solutions

Allied Health Associates administrators soon realized they needed professional help. But could one consulting company handle all their needs?

"We talked to one consultant who focused on EHR systems and another one that offered staff retention strategies. But these companies were all highly specialized," Miller says. *"It seemed that no one could help us with every item on our wish list – until we found DRM Group."*

DRM Group's multidisciplinary team examined every aspect of the practice – from the intake process to the décor in the waiting room. During the discovery phase of the project, DRM team members shadowed Allied Health Associates staff, distributed patient satisfaction surveys, evaluated systems and procedures, and got a little real-life feedback by hanging out in the waiting room.

The team made in-depth EHR training its first project. Allied Health Associates staff attended Patient Intake, Billing, Patient Visit, or Charting sessions depending on their roles. The streamlined sessions focused on often used features and included information on shortcuts and hot keys. In addition to conducting training sessions, DRMs training team recorded a series of two- to five-minute-long video walkthroughs on key functions and prepared quick start guides for each workstation.

"I noticed more smiling faces once the staff finally became comfortable with the new EHR system. Patient wait times also decreased as we mastered the technology," Miller says.

Once the EHR problem was solved, partners and administrators attended a leadership session conducted by DRM's leadership consultant.

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"The leadership session helped us evaluate our existing procedures and policies and realize that we needed to make a few changes. At the consultant's suggestion, we started a mentorship program, increased PTO, and formalized career paths. We also added two part-time front office employees and streamlined the patient intake process."
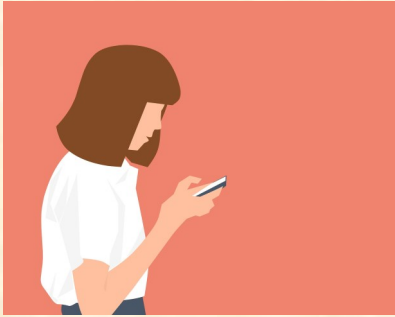
The DRM team recommended automating the most time-consuming processes, like appointment reminder calls. Allied Health's new automatic reminder system is not only efficient but fully HIPAA compliant. Miller noted that patients can choose to receive voice or text messages.

"Patients and staff really like the automated reminder system. It's a small thing but a real time saver."

Like many workplaces, the Allied Health Associates office featured a mismatched collection of uncomfortable office chairs. Sitting in the chairs was a painful experience that often caused neck and back pain.

DRM Group solved the problem by scheduling a visit with an ergonomics consultant. In addition to recommending new chairs and desks, she offered posture suggestions to reduce stress and strain on the muscles and joints.

Seventy-two percent of patients surveyed by DRM Group gave the waiting room low marks, noting the lack of entertainment options and old, uncomfortable furniture. Waiting room chairs were replaced with more comfortable options in a variety of sizes. Small touches, like covers for dripping umbrellas, cellphone charging stations, free WiFi, and a snack and beverage station Improved the waiting room experience.

I-pads loaded with a selection of magazines and games were the most popular additions to the waiting room. Patients can also check in, update personal information, and view updated wait times using the I-pad. Each I-pad is disinfected between patients and tethered to a chair to ensure that it doesn't disappear.

> "The I-pads are a hit, particularly with patients who were upset that we removed the magazines during the COVID epidemic. Although every patient doesn't check in with an I-pad, enough do that it has helped reduce intake times," Miller says.

A new website, designed by DRM's Web Services Department, offers an easily navigable site and a fully functioning portal that makes scheduling appointments or requesting refills quick and easy.

The practice informed patients about the changes with their new electronic newsletter – another DRM suggestion. The newsletter, produced bi-monthly, contains practice news and features, in addition to timely health information. Easy-to-use article templates make content creation quick and easy.

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Results

Implementing DRM Group Recommendations Reversed Patient Losses

Things improved rapidly once the DRM Group Practice Improvement Plan was approved by Allied Health Associates' management team. During the first month, appointment requests steadily increased among both new and established patients. Six months after the changes, patient satisfaction levels surpassed Miller's expectations.

"We're so happy we chose DRM Group. Honestly, we didn't expect to see significant changes as quickly as we did."

She credits the DRM Group team for their initiative and responsiveness.

"The team was always available to answer our questions or offer a different way of looking at a challenge. They found cost-effective solutions to our issues and really delivered for us."

Best of all, both patient volume and employee satisfaction have rebounded since Allied Health Associates implemented the changes recommended by DRM Group.

Key Outcomes

- 40 new patients in the first month
- 320 new patients over six months
- 60% increase in established patient return visits
- Overall wait time decreased to five minutes
- Patient satisfaction rating increased from 59% to 96%
- 43% increase in revenue

"Our entire team is happier and much more productive. Thanks to the DRM Group's help, we've improved the patient experience without sacrificing our staff members' well-being."

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