

REINVENTING YOUR PRACTICE

Technology Streamlines Internist's Practice

You don't have to be a computer wiz to take advantage of hardware and software—much of it free—that can help you improve patient care, said Dr. Benson W. Yu, an internist in Fairfax, Va.

Dr. Yu applies computer technology throughout his practice to get increased flexibility in everything from biweekly medication and vaccine inventories to the ability to communicate and consult with staff and colleagues virtually anywhere.

"I can send a patient's prescription to the pharmacy of my choice directly from my computer. Drug interaction and insurance information are automatically included in the printout," Dr. Yu said in an interview.

When away from his office, Dr. Yu conducts transactions using a free Web site that allows him quick access to his records.

Dr. Yu also uses Skype, a service that allows him to call any phone number from his computer. An all-in-one management

system from Lytec provides streamlined billing and office tasks and automatic appointment reminders for patients.

Dr. Yu maintains his own extensive PDF files of educational materials. By clicking on a desktop icon, he can easily call one up and make a print copy for a patient, which prevents the need to access the Web every time such information is needed.

To improve patient compliance with follow-up for abnormal lab values, Dr. Yu

posts the time of these scheduled visits on the computers. A Lytec software feature automatically prompts office staff to contact and remind patients a week ahead of their appointments.

All of this information technology "saves me, my staff, and patients valuable time; makes patient care more efficient; facilitates patient education; cuts down on return visits; and allows me to spend more time with each patient." ■



BENSON W.
YU, M.D.

Enter the REINVENTING YOUR PRACTICE Contest

Have you discovered new ways to improve patient care?

INTERNAL MEDICINE NEWS wants to hear from you if you've done something innovative to make your office practice more clinically effective, patient friendly, and efficient. We'll recognize up to six contestants whose ideas are selected by Dr. Bill Golden, Dr. Faith Fitzgerald, and other editorial board members. We'll feature the winning entries in future issues, and award a pocket-size, high-capacity (6- to 8-MP) digital camera to each of the winning physicians.



Here's a partial list of topics for improving patient care:

- Conducting effective patient interviews when you are pressed for time.
- Improving your diagnostic acumen by close observation of patients, noting clues such as a hoarse or deepened voice (hypothyroidism?), loose clothing (weight loss?), loss of associated movement or other subtle changes in walking (early Parkinson's disease?).
- Helping patients overcome cultural or socioeconomic barriers to treatment adherence.
- Using family, friends, and social agencies to help patients achieve therapeutic success.
- Providing effective group visits and redefining team-based care.
- Implementing effective process changes.
- Using patient survey data or patient information from other sites.
- Making effective use of information technology and quality measurement in the office.
- Using an innovative approach to managing a clinical condition.
- Making each patient feel important in a busy office.
- Communicating effectively when breaking bad news.
- Ending a short visit with an anxious patient in a positive way.
- Abandoning clinical approaches that don't work in actual practice.
- Doing something else to make patient visits truly therapeutic.

To enter the contest, write a brief description (300 words or less) of something you're doing to improve patient care. Send your entry, including telephone number, to:

E-mail: imnews@elsevier.com

Mail: Reinventing Your Practice
INTERNAL MEDICINE NEWS
5635 Fishers Lane, Suite 6000
Rockville, MD 20852

Fax: 240-221-2548

Responses must be sent by July 1, 2007. Multiple submissions are permitted. The contest judges will select the most valuable ideas; all decisions are final. Starting in the fall, watch for the winning entries in **INTERNAL MEDICINE NEWS**; other submissions may appear in later issues.

Simple Label Machine Subs for EMS System

If you're not ready to invest thousands of dollars in an electronic medical records system, a desktop label writer may be just what the doctor ordered.

"This is a very cost-effective alternative for anyone who doesn't have an EMR system," said Dr. Stephanie Lucas, who uses \$150 Dymo Twin Turbo label makers.

"I have all my prescriptions on the attached software, so all I have to do to print a label is go to the list on my computer, click on the prescription, and it comes out of the machine," said Dr. Lucas, who puts one label into the patient's chart and gives a second copy to the patient to take to the pharmacy, or faxes it.

The endocrinologist takes an extra step to ensure that patients know what medications are for. For example, in addition to "Statin 20 mg #90," the label also says "cholesterol med."

"Patients love it, and pharmacists appreciate being able to read the prescriptions," Dr. Lucas said. The desktop labeling system also integrates with many software programs such as Outlook and Quickbooks to produce individual labels.

"In addition, the data management software that comes with the machine contains our entire Rolodex file of physicians, so that patients referred to another facility get a legible copy of the name, address, and phone number on a printed label."

Dr. Lucas uses the label maker to print customized instructions for each patient, and puts a second copy into each chart. ■



STEPHANIE
LUCAS, M.D.

By Bruce K. Dixon, Chicago Bureau