

## **In Search of the Holy Grail - An EMR That Really Works**

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I have had the opportunity to review and test dozens of electronic medical record systems over the years. All of them had some of the features that would make it possible to go paperless, some of them features that made it easy to document each visit with your patients, and some had the ability to allow your EMR to communicate with your practice management or billing program. However, almost all of them had deficiencies that either burden the physician and slow him\her down and reduce the efficiency of the practice, or were so sensitive that they frequently crashed and become inoperable, forcing the doctor to return to the paper chart just like he\she did in the good ol' days.

Now an EMR program is available that has all of the bells and whistles as well as the core functionality that allows you to practice medicine with enhanced efficiency. The system also results in an increase in reimbursements by accurate coding that can survive the microscope of the most intense audit from Medicare or any other payer. In this article I will review the best EMR I have ever seen for Urologists, meridianEMR™, using XML generated clinical templates developed by one of our own colleagues, Dr. H.S. Jackson, a urologist in Murray, Kentucky.

### **A History Lesson**

Dr. Jackson began his quest for the Holy Grail in 1998. Shortly after the Balanced Budget Act in 1997 he read that doctors had to document the normal findings in their history and physical examination in order to receive E & M credit for their codes. With a minimum of research he discovered that nearly 85% of all E & M records contain normal values. With that fact and stimulus, he wrote a program to digitize and document normal values in both the history and physical exam. This was the beginning of a 5-year journey that has taken him from macros to money in the doctors' pocket.

Dr. Jackson, a urologist like you and me, is not an engineer, nor does he have a degree in computer science. However, he does think like a physician and has learned computer programming by hard work and with lots of advice from computer experts. He began working with Hamilton Scientific, a company started in 1998 by physicians and computer software experts in New Jersey. The idea was to develop clinical templates that built in the thought process of practicing physicians while they were practicing medicine. As a physician conducted their normal exams, they would simply tap on a touch screen or tablet, or point and click a mouse, and their visit would be documented. The resulting note would be built on synthetic dictation automatically generated from the template and choices made during the exam. As Dr. Jackson is an urologist, he put most of his efforts into building urology templates for himself and his colleagues.

### **The Bottom Line**

Normally I include the summary of my article at the end. But I would like to get your attention by giving you the bottom line on meridianEMR from a pure dollars and sense standpoint. As a result of implementing the EMR in his own practice, Dr. Jackson and other physicians have done very well. As an example, a solo Urologist has put an extra \$6600\month into his profit column by moving his coding curve to the right, i.e., increasing the Level 4 and 5 E&M codes and decreasing the Level 1 & 2 codes. He has also decreased his expenses by \$2800\month by eliminating his transcriptionist. So what was the real net effect for this typical urologist? He has increased his profit approximately \$9400\month since he instituted the meridianEMR in his practice. That computes to \$112,800 annually without seeing one additional patient and without working one minute longer than he did before EMR. Using the meridianEMR with urology-specific templates truly allows us to work smarter and not harder.

### **The Unique Features of meridianEMR**

The meridianEMR software is user friendly and uses the same intuitive process that urologists use when they see patients. The program may be run on any Windows PC which is properly configured, and is normally used by doctors with a tablet PC (Dr. Jackson uses a Motion Computing tablet) or a touch-screen notebook, (usually a Fujitsu). Both systems use touch screen technology where the stylus functions as a mouse. As a result, little or no typing is required. Most of the data can be inserted by using drop down menus and tapping through special Urology templates of the most common urologic conditions such as hematuria, BPH, prostate cancer, UTI, incontinence and erectile dysfunction.

The tablets or notebooks usually weigh less than three pounds and use wireless technology so the doctor is not tethered to the computer or is required to lug a heavy laptop from room to room. The tablets are also capable of handwriting recognition and Dr. Jackson says it can read his poor penmanship with 98% accuracy. The computer also has voice recognition software that can capture your dictation with 85% accuracy.

Probably one of the most unique features of the program is its ability to compute the E&M of your patient encounter. Your days of under coding and your days of increased reimbursement have arrived! And best of all, you can go to sleep knowing that you can survive any audit because you have legally documented what you have done for your patients. As a matter of fact, Dr. Jackson told me of an urologist who had successfully survived a Medicare audit and the auditor commented that the charts were the best electronic medical records she had ever seen.

A new version of the program has just been released which contains a pharmacy FAX module that will FAX your prescriptions to the patient's pharmacy, a drug interaction and allergy alert reminder system, and a Health Maintenance module that allows the system to track your patients each day and alerts you of any need to recall them (it runs in the background of the computer without your staff having to do anything).

Dr. Jackson and meridianEMR are also working on a computer interface with Meditech, (which

is used by hundreds of hospitals according to Dr. Jackson) so it can electronically retrieve the hospital's lab, x-ray and pathology department information and automatically include it in a patient's electronic chart. Interfaces with Laboratory systems are also available. As a result there is no need to scan records and reports from the hospital into your EMR. The system does include an Image and Fax Navigator which allows documents to be scanned into your system and be properly sent to the correct chart or physician for review by a staff member. Faxes are also handled in a similar manner.

meridianEMR will easily interface with your practice management software if the software has an HL7 interface. This allows for patient demographic data, appointments scheduled, and charges generated by the EMR to be integrated so that this data from the practice management system will populate the EMR thereby reducing the need for duplicate entry into the two systems.

One of the outstanding technologies this system includes is their blended model – where a small but powerful LINUX server is installed in your office, which the physicians and staff work. This provides a very fast and reliable system and peace of mind for you and your colleagues. At the same time data is being stored on your server, the system sends the exact data to the company's web server as a backup and place for you to get patient information anytime, anyplace, via an Internet connection in a HIPAA compliant manner.

This is truly the best of both worlds. In probably all other systems, if their server goes down, you are paralyzed. If they are using an ASP model where your records and software operate only through the Internet, and the Internet is down, you are non-functional. In meridianEMR's model, if your server goes down, you automatically connect and work off the Internet. After the server is repaired, the system automatically syncs up any new data entered via the Internet onto your server so both systems have exact duplicate data again. The company also saves your staff time (and you money) by providing backup CDs of your data at your requested intervals.

The system includes a toll-free customer support hot line, monthly software and template updates, and remote data hosting and backup of your data. The software and template updates are sent from the Internet onto your network and tablet PC in the evenings, thereby reducing staff time in this area.

As you can tell, I was extremely impressed with this product, and believe any urologist seriously considering an EMR for their office should include meridianEMR in their search.