Increasing patient convenience and appointment volume: The tipping point of a successful telemedicine practice

Overview

Austin Urology Institute is one of the leading urology offices serving Austin, Texas and surrounding areas. Koushik Shaw, MD, leads a team of nurse practitioners, nurses, surgical assistants, and office managers. The office specializes in issues including kidney stone removal, kidney transplants, various cancer types, and commonplace issues such as family planning and vasectomies. In the beginning, telemedicine adoption was a slow process for Austin Urology Institute. Once Dr. Shaw targeted a specific set of appointment types ideal for telemedicine, a tipping point occurred and the practice began to boost revenue and appointment volume. As Dr. Shaw states, “Telemedicine is a new concept for doctors and a new concept for medicine. It was a slow adoption for us to buy into it.”

Challenge

As the clinic grew in popularity in Austin, patient foot traffic increased as well. Dr. Shaw began to search for an additional venue to see patients without physically bringing them into the office. “We needed a relief valve because our clinic has gotten so busy in terms of physical visits,” he explains. They were looking for a solution that could promote convenience and increase patient satisfaction.

Solution

In search of a modern solution to help the practice keep up with patient demand without increasing overhead costs, Austin Urology Institute looked to their EHR technology, athenahealth. Athenahealth leads the way in health tech innovation by providing a marketplace of seamless integrations with complimentary third-party products. It’s here that Austin Urology Institute found Chiron Health and was drawn to the simplicity of the telemedicine software that would allow them to connect with patients for routine appointments over secure video. Chiron Health integrates with leading EHRs, like athenahealth, allowing practices to schedule video visits in their EHR and automatically check patient insurance eligibility while maintaining their current office workflow. Due to this advanced feature set compared to other major players in the market, Dr. Shaw committed to Chiron Health.

“This is a tool that allows us to bill for the actual time we are spending with our patients.”

“Chiron Health has allowed me to keep up with the patient population that is more technologically and digitally advanced.”

Contact Chiron Health info@chironhealth.com / (800) 768-8131 / www.chironhealth.com
Results

Once Dr. Shaw was ready to see patients over video with Chiron Health, the next step was determining what appointment types were a good fit for telemedicine. Over the next few weeks the team narrowed down a set of patients and appointment types to use telemedicine. Initially these types of appointments were targeted at patients with long commutes. The reach of the practice continued to expand to surrounding areas of Austin including San Marcos, San Antonio, and Bastrop. For patients living in these areas, a two- to four-hour window would be needed to make a round-trip visit into the office to see Dr. Shaw. He provides one use case of “a man from Fredericksburg, 1.5 hours from Austin, who scheduled an appointment for a prostate cancer evaluation. Before the biopsy was performed, imaging would need to be ordered and discussed. Normally this would lead to another in-office for the patient, but after deciding these results could be done via video, the patient saved about three to four hours out of his day.”

Dr. Shaw realized an observer might state that these results could be discussed over the phone rather than by video. Telemedicine has instead been turned into a revenue generator, as Dr. Shaw notes, “this is a tool that allows us to bill for the actual time we are spending with our patients.”

Once the practice began conducting more frequent telemedicine appointments with patients, it was easier to identify the proper use cases and visit types. The team determined that reviewing and discussing lab results with patients was an ideal fit. The practice was also able to leverage their physician extenders (nurse practitioners and physician assistants) to conduct telemedicine appointments to save doctors’ time for higher acuity appointments.

One best practice Chiron Health promotes is the idea of “block scheduling” within a practice to set aside time for these types of visits. Dr. Shaw uses Tuesday afternoons to connect with patients over video. Since he is out in the field and operating on those days, he is able to see patients between surgeries. As of now, Austin Urology Institute is seeing an additional 20 to 40 patients monthly by using these telemedicine best practices.

Conclusion

Even though Austin Urology Institute was slow to utilize telemedicine to its fullest initially, they quickly realized the benefits of Chiron Health to patients and providers within a few months of implementation. Dr. Shaw likes to think of Austin Urology Institute as a leading-edge, tech-savvy company. He understands that this is a feature patients are searching for when selecting the right specialist for their needs. In his eyes, offering video visits is a great marketing tool to promote the practice as well as an excellent quality proposition. “Patients look at us and look at competing practices and start comparing websites. They are very progressive and on top of their game when selecting the right doctor and clinic,” he says. “Chiron Health has allowed me to keep up with the patient population that is more technologically and digitally advanced.”