



Solving Legal and Business Problems of Health Care Providers for Over 30 Years

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Automated Patient Messaging

One of a manager's jobs is to keep abreast of cutting edge technology that can reduce costs and bolster practice performance. One of our jobs is to help you find and identify those technologies.

We recently came across one such advance called PAM2000, a form of automated patient messaging. This is an amazingly versatile piece of software that lets you substantially improve communications with patients while dramatically reducing staff time. Even better it takes tasks that employees prefer to avoid and turns them over to a machine. On top of that, creative use of PAM can provide risk management benefits. We are particularly excited about this software. We have been lecturing since the early 1990s that this capacity was available and would offer real benefits to medical practices.

How does it work?

For its most basic function, appointment reminder messages, PAM2000 interfaces with your computer scheduling program. It uploads the patient information: name and phone number. This operation requires attention by your staff. It takes about four (yes, four!) minutes. Staff involvement is finished. Then PAM merrily dials away calling your patients with a pre-programmed message reminding patients of their appointments. What would often take a staff person two hours is reduced to minutes.

Better yet, the messages are customizable. You can set the system messages to remind HMO patients to bring a referral and Medicare patients to bring all of their medications and dietary supplements. Equally impressive is the message is delivered in your receptionist's (or other staffer's) voice, calling the patient by name. Don't worry, your receptionist doesn't have to record all the patient names since PAM's library contains most common names. And PAM will flag names that it does not recognize. The patients hear someone with whom they are accustomed to speaking.

Messages can be delivered in multiple languages. Once the patient selects, say Spanish, PAM remembers that preference for future calls.

You set the parameters for calls including day and time. PAM can call after office hours and stop calling at a specified time; there is no need for you to be there. You can have PAM call on weekends if you choose. You also select how many repeat tries, busy signals and how many rings and repeat tries for calls not answered.

Maximizing your investment

The biggest downfall of almost all productivity-related software is that users do not maximize the software's capability. Industry experts suggest that only twenty percent of the capacity of any particular software is actually used. What is unclear is whether that shortfall comes from a lack of training, effort or creativity. A lack of time is no excuse: productivity gains come from time investment up front in developing the system. Don't let that happen to your automated messaging system. Think about the possibilities for PAM and bring them to fruition.

Here are a few possibilities:

- Patient recall: routine eye, physicals or OBGYN appointments; six month (or longer) follow-up visits.
- Appointment cancellations: Won't your staff like ducking delivering this message! Oh, and please call us to re-schedule.

- Immunizations: Hepatitis B, early childhood, tetanus, flu shots; Whatever you are willing to schedule, PAM can call.
- Normal lab results.
- Testing: fasting reminders, mammograms, dexa-scans, pacer checks, lipid checks, blood pressure checks.
- Referrals: please confirm that you followed our recommendation to see a surgeon, gastroenterologist, psychiatrist or whatever.
- No Show re-schedules.
- Please call our office: to provide insurance information, because you are a deadbeat and we would like to be paid, because the doctor needs to talk to you about your test results (none, of course, of which is said in the actual message).
- Come pick up your ...: eyeglasses, cosmetics, allergy serum, disability form, school form, camp form, etc.
- New practice information: new doctor, office closing, street detours.

We can think of at least six additional applications that would benefit different specialties.

Documentation, documentation, documentation

In addition to the substantial day-to-day benefits, your physicians will appreciate the risk management benefits of PAM2000. Now you will have documentation that patients were called and reminded of the steps needed to guard their health. Patient claims of misunderstanding referral directions or the need for testing or return visits can be nipped in the bud. While, thankfully, these don't come up very often, such claims are troublesome when they do. PAM2000 provides the perfect response.

You can learn more about this program by visiting www.PAM2000.com.

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