

The Virtual Practice

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With the advent of HIPAA and the extra burden of additional compliance requirements put upon the practice, shrinking reimbursements, and increasing malpractice insurance costs, you need to be much more efficient and focused in order to stay ahead.

The hottest new trend in computer technology for the medical office is the Virtual Practice. The Virtual Practice moves all of the major computer hardware components out of the office and with it the headaches and distractions of maintaining and administering a computer system. The Virtual office works on the principal of letting people do what they do best. Let the office staff run the office not the computer system. Have a professional computer company run the computer system. The Virtual office is suitable not only for large multi site practices but for the small single practitioner as well.

The virtual office reduces greatly the capital outlay required to purchase computer hardware and to upgrade, repair and replace hardware on a regular basis. The virtual office uses Winterm units instead of traditional PC's and a modem. The new generation of Winterm gives the user the look and feel of windows but with an extremely high level of security and reliability. The Winterm have an estimated useful life of 12 years, have no moving parts (no hard drives to crash), and use ¼ of the electricity of a PC.

The server for the office is then located with a computer hosting company. The computer hosting company, with its trained technicians then takes over the responsibility of maintaining the server, doing upgrades to the software and operating system, applying critical security patches and making sure the virus software is up to date, these are done on a daily basis. This also saves your staff from being diverted from their primary tasks and the down time that can be caused by doing maintenance and upgrades during office hours. With the virtual office all maintenance and upgrades occur during the nighttime hours so as to not affect the functioning of the office. They will provide enterprise class firewall systems to protect the system from intrusion, virus protection, and backup and disaster recover software and hardware to protect your data. The cost of this level of equipment would be prohibitive for an individual practice to purchase but a hosting company spreads the cost over multiple clients and makes a very secure and reliable system now very affordable.

With the new security requirements and contingency requirements of HIPAA, maintaining a compliant computer system now becomes much more costly in terms of dollars and manpower to keep a computer system in house. Self-maintaining an in-house system also has much greater risk for the practice. By using a virtual office you not only move a lot of the cost out of the office but also much of the risks that are inherent in maintaining and supporting your own in house system.

Some other advantages of the virtual office are that your computer cost are now a fixed monthly fee that you can actually budget for. They are no unexpected costs for repairs, upgrades or replacements of obsolete hardware. You can access your information from anywhere in the world. You can pick up and move your office with a minimal amount of effort and be up and running.

In closing, the virtual office lets you concentrate on the practice of medicine and not having to be a computer administrator.

Raymond F. Posa, MBA is Technology Advisor to the American Academy of Podiatric Practice Management and President. He is founder of R. Francis in its thirteenth year of operation, specializing in analyzing the operations of small companies and medical practices and applying the appropriate technological solutions. R. Francis Associates was awarded the 1999 Circle of Excellence Award for best small business in Monmouth County, New Jersey, by the Western Monmouth Chamber of Commerce. Any questions or comments can be addressed to Mr. Posa by E-mail: Rposa@Rfrancis.com.