

Case Study

Emory Orthopaedics & Spine Center

Preeminent Doctor Enhances Patient Care and Improves Efficiency with a Fujitsu STYLISTIC ST5000 Tablet PC-based Solution



Dr. Scott Boden, Professor of Orthopaedic Surgery and Director of the Emory Orthopaedics & Spine Center, has a deep understanding of what it takes to run a successful medical practice that provides optimal patient care in today's complex health care environment. A lauded physician and researcher—he discovered a gene that triggers human bone growth—Dr. Boden gained this insight while treating thousands of patients each year.

Creating a highly efficient, consistent, and cost-effective way to evaluate and treat patients is, according to Dr. Boden, central to success. He also places a high priority on gathering comprehensive data on patient outcomes, while easing the burden of medical documentation.

Fujitsu STYLISTIC Tablet PC Addresses Doctor's Issues

To tackle these issues, Dr. Boden worked closely with the National Spine Network (NSN), a non-profit integrated spine registry and clinical trial network whose members include many prestigious Spine Centers of Excellence in the country. NSN's mission is to improve the quality, cost effectiveness and consistency of care for spine patients.

Dr. Boden, who is NSN's chairman, helped NSN develop SpineChart, a software tool running on Fujitsu STYLISTIC® Tablet PCs. The hardware/software solution automates the patient intake process and, in so doing, helps address the needs Dr. Boden has outlined. SpineChart has also been used to support "paperless" clinical research trials.

"Before, the patient would have to fill out a paper intake form that was seven to 10 pages. Not all of the questions were relevant and there was no way to control whether they were answering all of the questions. It was a relatively inefficient way of collecting information," explains Dr. Boden.

Once the patient was in the exam room, the doctor or physician's assistant would take a history, perform an exam and later dictate office visit notes and the patient's treatment plan using a medical transcription service.

Today, the process is quite different. A new or returning patient checks in at the front desk and is handed a lightweight Fujitsu STYLISTIC Tablet PC. Using the pen, designed for smooth inking, the patient answers questions covering their chief complaint, history of present illness, and medical history. The questions appear on screen in a large font—helpful for the elderly—and pop up one at a time to make the questionnaire less overwhelming. For returning patients, some questions relate to answers

The customer

Who: A large health care system and health network that brings together a full range of hospitals, clinics and local practices

Location: Georgia, US

The challenge

To create a highly efficient, consistent, and cost-effective way to evaluate and treat patients while easing the burden of medical documentation and gathering comprehensive data on patient outcomes.

The solution

Deploy Fujitsu STYLISTIC Tablet PC running SpineChart software to automate and ease patient intake and treatment.

The benefits

The Fujitsu STYLISTIC Tablet PC-based solution saves time, enhances patient care, tracks patient outcomes and saves each doctor up to \$30,000 annually in medical transcription costs.

given during previous visits. The system is so simple that patients need not be trained on the Fujitsu STYLISTIC Tablet PCs.

"The simplicity of the Fujitsu STYLISTIC Tablet PCs is an attraction for me," says Dr. Boden. "It doesn't require the end user to be computer savvy. It involves no more than touching buttons on the screen, like an ATM," says Dr. Boden. He notes that though PDAs and notebooks were also considered for this solution, the Fujitsu STYLISTIC Tablet PC was selected because of its superior ease of use. Dr. Boden adds that it speaks well of Fujitsu technology that his office was able to install the solution without an IT person.

"As in all businesses, the costs of running a medical practice continue to escalate. Every physician has to look constantly for opportunities to reduce costs. If you can find a way to reduce costs while simultaneously improving patient care and providing patient outcomes data, you have an amazingly powerful combination of benefits."

– Dr. Scott Boden, Professor of Orthopaedic Surgery and Director of the Emory Orthopaedics & Spine Center.

Once the patient interview is complete, the data is sent over the clinic's wireless network to the system's file server. The patient data is housed on the server and is periodically submitted over the Internet to the NSN's national database. A patient report, which also culls data from previous visits, prints out immediately in the doctor's work area signaling that the patient is ready to be seen.

"It helps us with patient flow and, before the doctor walks into the exam room, we can scan the report and have a much more focused visit with the patient," says Dr. Boden.

Solution Eliminates Need for Costly Medical Transcription Services

The automated solution has enabled Dr. Boden to stop using medical transcription services, which are costly and can take days to process dictation. "At the end of clinic, my office notes, letters to referring physicians and pre-operative H+P [history and physical] notes are instantly ready, which facilitates referrals and pre-certification of procedures. As a bonus, outcomes data are collected on all of my surgical patients automatically," explains Boden.

The Fujitsu STYLISTIC Tablet PCs have received high marks in Dr. Boden's practice not just for ease of use, but also for durability. Since 2002, when the Fujitsu STYLISTIC Tablet PCs were first introduced into Dr. Boden's practice, the units have been handled by thousands of patients. To date, though a number of Fujitsu STYLISTIC Tablet PCs have been dropped, all but one are still in service.

STYLISTIC Tablet PC Ushers in Better Care and Bottom Line Benefits

The benefits of the new system have been far reaching and range from saving money to increasing accuracy and efficiency while enhancing patient care.

"Eliminating the need for medical transcription is a \$15,000 to \$30,000 annual savings per doctor and possibly more if you were in a specialty that dictates five days a week," says Dr. Boden. In fact, to encourage doctors in his practice to use the new system, Dr. Boden now has each doctor pay for his or her own transcription services rather than sharing costs across the practice.

Though time savings are harder for Dr. Boden to quantify, he says he is definitely more efficient now that activities like generating office notes and physician's referral letters are automated. "I think some doctors could realize a 10 to 20 percent time savings."

With additional time to focus on patient care, and better information in hand when entering the exam room, Dr. Boden says patient visits are more productive and in-depth. "We can talk about education and things we don't often have time to do."


What's more, tracking clinical outcomes—a major focus in medicine today because this data is very helpful for making patient treatment decisions—is now significantly easier. "Normally, collecting outcomes data is a chore. Figuring out paper forms and how to get the information in the database is not such a simple thing. The SpineChart and Fujitsu STYLISTIC Tablet PC solution really makes outcomes data collection unbelievably simple because it is baked into the normal, everyday practice."

One issue Dr. Boden has come up against is that some doctors in his practice are reticent to try something new. But, they are coming around as they use the system more and see how well it integrates with the existing Electronic Medical Records (EMR) and appointment scheduling software. Most importantly, they are beginning to enjoy the bottom-line benefits.

"As in all businesses, the costs of running a medical practice continue to escalate. Every physician has to look constantly for opportunities to reduce costs. If you can find a way to reduce costs while simultaneously improving patient care and providing patient outcomes data, you have an amazingly powerful combination of benefits," concludes Dr. Boden.

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