

Medical Practice Trends Podcast 44**How the Cloud Can Help Your Practice, Mary Pat Whaley – ManageMyPractice.com**

Peter: This is Peter J. Polack M.D. with another Medical Practice Trends podcast. Our guest today is Mary Pat Whaley, a practice management consultant who blogs on ManageMyPractice.com. Welcome, Mary Pat.

Mary Pat: Thanks so much for having me.

Peter: Our topic today is How the Cloud Can Help Your Practice. Maybe for those physicians or practice administrators who don't know which cloud you're referring to, maybe you can get them up to speed on that.

Mary Pat: Absolutely. All the cloud really is, is an offsite storage area. We call it "the cloud" because you never exactly know where it is and the cloud is redundant. It could potentially be that you're storing information primarily in California, but there's also some information stored in Minnesota or it's redundant; your information is backed up in Minnesota. So we say "the cloud" because we acknowledge that data centers are ubiquitous and we're not worried at this point. We just know that our information is safe.

The cloud is a different platform for document storage and management and collaboration with those documents. It's the next iteration in the shared documents on your server in your office. But when we take it to the cloud, it means that the information can be accessed anywhere, any time and there's a lot more flexibility with how we can manipulate the data and how we can give other people access to the data.

Peter: A lot of practices that have their own EMR, or at the least, a practice management system, know well enough or have been told that they need to have a backup plan for their data. Often they'll have backup tapes. They'll either lock them in a fire safe or take them offsite. But you're also referring to all documentation of the practice that's really part of an overall disaster recovery plan.

Mary Pat: Absolutely. One of the most important things that we do in practice management is compile the credentialing and privileging information of our physicians so that they can work in the hospitals, so that they can retain their licenses, and so they can be credentialed with different payers. Obviously it doesn't make any difference if you can see patients if you can't get the payers to pay you because you're not credentialed.

Lots of different information is stored traditionally in paper form in the practice administrator's office, or sometimes in public folders onsite. But I really recommend that managers take the

next step and store that information on the cloud. It's easily accessible by whoever you give the permission to, it's easily updatable, and it's available. If your practice burns to the ground and you need to start over, you know your information didn't go down.

Peter: Or the more likely scenario: your practice manager or your person in charge of IT gets hit by the proverbial bus.

Mary Pat: Absolutely. I think one of my responsibilities as a manager of a practice is risk management. There's no question that if I don't have everything well organized and available and I do get hit by the proverbial bus, I haven't done my job if things are not ready for the next person to step in and take care of the practice.

Peter: It's a difficult thing for people to deal with. It's sort of like life insurance. There are people in key positions, such as an IT director or maybe a billing director, who feel like the only person who can really do the job well is that person themselves. They may have a lot of information that is in their domain that perhaps they don't trust to their subordinates. But that can be a problem when you've got one person who we like to say has the keys to the kingdom and they do get hit by that bus. What happens?

Mary Pat: You absolutely make your practice very vulnerable if you do not have everything well documented and you have those documents secure, but available on an administrative level, on a top level. IT especially, and other places in the practice, can be very territorial, but you have to understand that risk management means there can never be just one person that knows any mission critical information. There has to be a sharing of that information if you're going to protect the practice.

Peter: We had also talked previously about getting the most out of your medical software. Not necessarily in a disaster scenario, but just somebody leaving and bringing in the next person and they're not really that familiar with the particular practice management or EMR system, that it's very helpful to have all those processes and protocols in a place that's easily accessible, and the redundancy just makes that safer.

Mary Pat: Absolutely. Sometimes people will say, "I'm too busy to write down what I'm doing." But you have to do that. It's like your filing. "I'm too busy to file." Well, if you're scanning everything that you file and putting it on the cloud, it makes it much easier. Likewise, you have to stop, make sure your protocols are written down, make sure there's a process for updating them and tweaking them on the cloud, make sure your job descriptions are current, make sure that there's a path.

One of the nice things about the cloud platform that I use is that different versions are easy to track so that you have kind of a timeline as to "When did we stop doing this and start doing

that?” or with fees or with anything that you change, trying to remember even just six months ago when that changed and why it changed. But with cloud applications, you get different versions and that’s extremely helpful to be able to go back and remember why you made the decisions you did.

Peter: That’s great. If anyone wants any more information, can you remind us about your website?

Mary Pat: My website is www.ManageMyPractice.com. You can access about 500 free articles and documents and definitions of health care words, but you can also sign up for every time I publish a new post to get it sent to your e-mail.

Peter: Thanks for your time.

Mary Pat: Thank you.