

Photograph by Colin Rowe

Teaching hospital moves forward with Practice Solutions Software

The Élisabeth Bruyère Family Medicine Centre (EB-FMC) is one of the original training sites for family medicine in Ottawa. This large, busy and vibrant clinic, situated on the main floor of the Bruyère Hospital of the Sisters of Charity of Ottawa Health Services (SCO), serves a culturally and economically diverse population. The EB-FMC is located in the historic Market area of Ottawa and offers fully bilingual services.

In addition to five clinical teams composed of receptionists, nurses, faculty and resident physicians, the EB-FMC employs other health care providers such as a pharmacist, nurse practitioners and social workers. The Centre has nine staff physicians and about 35 family medicine residents.

Family physicians run several special-focused clinics on site, which form an integral part of the residency program. EB-FMC strives to create and maintain a healthy, collaborative work and learning environment.

A new medical centre, the Primrose Family Medicine Centre, opened this past August as part of the Bruyère Family Health Team and Family Health Network (FHT & FHN). This new family medicine unit is based in a stand-alone building on the site of SCO's St. Vincent Hospital, located on the western edge of the downtown core in Ottawa, bordering the Chinatown and Little Italy districts and Centretown.

The Primrose site has four faculty staff physicians and between nine and 12 family medicine residents, and offers a comprehensive and flexible post-graduate teaching program designed to allow its graduates to practice independently in any setting. Together, the EB-FMC and the Primrose sites form the Bruyère Academic Family Health Network. Both clinics are principal teaching units of the University of Ottawa's Department of Family Medicine.

The Bruyère-FHN was looking for an electronic medical records (EMR) system to replace their existing system, one that would enable them to manage their appointment scheduling, billing, and patient records electronically.

As the Bruyère-FHN is a Family Health Network, it qualifies for funding from the Ontario Ministry of Health. While they already had an EMR system in place, which Dr. Robert Bernstein and Dr. Gary Hollingworth had developed, it was not a certified system.

As part of the overall Ontario e-Health strategy, jointly developed by the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care and the Ontario Medical Association, primary care physicians are being encouraged to adopt greater use of IT in their practices. One of the ways this is accomplished is through the Physician IT Funding Program, available to physicians who purchase an approved clinical management system.

The clinic could have submitted their homemade EMR system for certification testing, but they would have needed to add components to their software for

billing and partnered with a billing software vendor and others to create the requisite level of integration for compliance.

The negotiations between the Bruyère-FHN and Practice Solutions (PS) began last March with a meeting between PS' Jeremy Gordon, manager, client service and support; Frank Rezny, account manager; Shawn Millin, vice-president, product management; and the two Bruyère-FHN physicians, Dr. Gary Hollingworth of the EB-FMC and Dr. Alan Ng of the Primrose FMC, who were taking the lead role in the software selection for both sites. The meeting included a needs discovery and a brief demonstration of the software. This led to a more in-depth presentation for a larger group of doctors and staff.

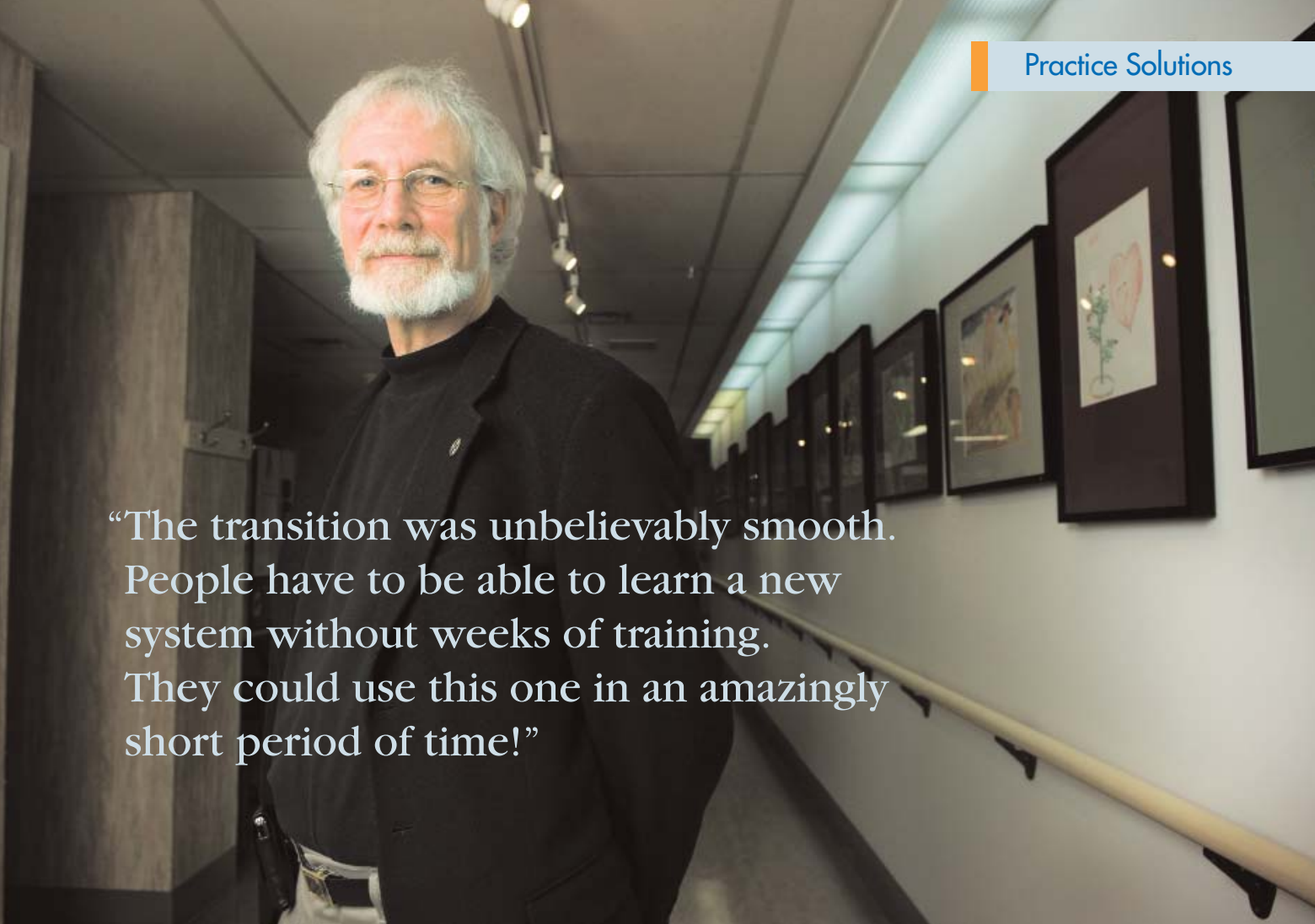
"Since we were considering different systems and interviewing people to become staff physicians for our university department at the same time, I asked candidates what EMR system they used. Many of them were using (the) Practice Solutions Software Suite and, as a rule, they loved it. On that basis, we looked at it," explained Dr. Robert Bernstein, the lead FHN physician and medical director.

The physicians were aware of the Practice Solutions Software Suite for some time, but regarded it as primarily a Macintosh solution. They had heard that the Suite had crossed platforms and knew that its reputation was solid, but still needed to be reassured that it could perform as well on Windows PCs, and in a large "two-site, one-solution" situation.

Originally designed in 1988 by Dr. James Kavanagh, a practising family physician in southwestern Ontario and, currently, vice-president of research and development for Practice Solutions Software, the Suite was developed to provide significant advantages to physicians regardless of their practice setting.

During the meeting, the PS team made copious notes about the features the clinic required in a software program. Using the Practice Solutions Software Suite in a teaching unit where physicians have to supervise several residents required the PS team to make changes to the software to facilitate this supervision. Dr. Bernstein noted the commitment PS had to delivering a product into which the clinic had a chance to provide design input.

"We agreed to work with the SCO Hospital Information Services to provide computers in a configuration that closely matched their standards, to ensure that support issues would be minimized," explained Frank Rezny, PS Consulting's account manager.

A photograph of Dr. Bernstein, an older man with white hair and a beard, wearing glasses and a dark jacket. He is standing in a hallway with framed pictures on the wall and a handrail. The text is overlaid on the image.

“The transition was unbelievably smooth. People have to be able to learn a new system without weeks of training. They could use this one in an amazingly short period of time!”

Dr. Bernstein was notably impressed with the Software Suite’s ease of use. The programmers and staff involved in migrating the clinic from its current system managed to migrate 95% of it over in one go. Once the staff physicians were trained in using the software, they provided residents and students with a half-hour training session and a couple of demonstration patient files to play with. The staff physicians were thrilled to see that when the half-hour was up, the students knew it well enough to use it that afternoon.

“The transition was unbelievably smooth,” explained Dr. Bernstein. “We have 45 residents in our program each year with a 50% turnover rate every year. We have extra residents and medical students arriving all the time. People have to be able to learn a new system without weeks of training. They could use this one in an amazingly short period of time!”

While the expectation of strong and reliable support from Practice Solutions Software was an important consideration in the selection process, Bruyère-FHN is even more pleased that those expectations have not only been met, but also exceeded.

As a result of working closely with the hospital’s help desk and gathering input from them, several new processes were developed to better the client experience. “Responses to the inevitable issues that come up in the implementation of new software in a complex environment have been both timely and effective, and the Practice Solutions team has shown outstanding commitment,” said Dr. Bernstein.

The Practice Solutions Software Suite is the only practice software backed by the Canadian Medical Association (CMA). It offers billing and scheduling, as well as a robust EMR component that integrates patient profiles, progress notes, drug interactions, laboratory results, and prescription writing for a fully paperless office.

Practice Solutions Software and the other companies operating under the Practice Solutions brand offer end-to-end solutions in technology, leasing, and practice management consulting services.

For more information, contact the PS Hotline at 1 800 361-9151.