



PRACTICE MANAGEMENT

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY IN PRACTICE: PRACTICE AND FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

The next group of areas that can be supported by technology is the practice management layer, which encompasses financial and practice management as well as claims processing.

When attempting to determine the systems and technology that are required, it is important to approach this from an information and systems perspective. This means ensuring that the three architectural layers are specified:

- business architecture, which determines what the practice requires and what the expected performance should be
- application architecture, which determines the application components and databases to satisfy the business requirements
- technical architecture, which is the technology required to support the application and business requirements.

The requirements for these are specified by simply asking the questions 'what', 'why', 'where', 'when', 'who', 'how' and 'with what'.

Business architecture

The practice process model includes a set of eight processes that illustrate the complete view of the activities needed to conduct business: (i) plan the business; (ii) market and sell practice service; (iii) implement practice management system; (iv) research and continuous development; (v) receive and manage customers (appointments); (vi) perform doctor's qualified task (diagnose; prescribe, advise, procedures or refer; follow up); (vii) run practice (submit claims to medical aid; manage month-end financials; manage people and payroll for practice; capture debtor (patient) transactions; collect debtors; analyse practice reports and other financial information; analyse and manage practice personnel details; interpret monthly management information from practice; receive financial advice; manage assets; manage stock); (viii) manage suppliers.

Application architecture

There are a number of practice management systems in circulation and the system chosen must be comprehensive in terms of functionality and technology requirements. The following requirements should be addressed by any practice management system:

- diary / appointment bookings
- debtors transaction processing
- payments
- EDI facility through QEDI/Healthbridge to submit medical aid claims, or Internet-enabled medical aid submission
- stock management for dispensing

- code structures – CPT4, SAMA, ICD10, Nappi
- update drug file and medical aid file from MedPrax
- reporting
- technology – Windows-based, rather than DOS-based; relational or object database like Paradox database; and based on ODBC which means the system can run on ACCESS and SQL Interfaces to any platform, Win '98/2000, NT, AS400, Linux operating system.

The other key application that all practices should have is an effective financial package. There are many financial systems in the industry but experience indicates that Pastel, Brilliant and AccPac are very capable packages and will be most suitable.

Once again the choice of financial package is a personal one, but requirements that must be met by the financial package selected are: accounting, general ledger, debtors, creditors, stock control, report writer, asset management, payroll, calculate employee salaries, leave, print payslips, link to ACB for payments.

Technical architecture

When considering the technical architecture, it is important to note that the application chosen for practice management and financials will dictate the technology that needs to be used. The key thing to bear in mind is that the newest technologies are the best to use, given the rate of change of technology. Secondly if possible the practice management and financials should use the same technology. This will ensure that they will be easier to use and manage.

The other application technology that is needed is an office system for word processing, spreadsheets and graphics. There are basically two options that run on the Windows operating system:

- MS Office, which includes MS Word, MS Excel, MS Power Point
- Lotus Smartsuite, which includes Freelance Graphics, Lotus 1-2-3 and Amipro/Wordpro.

Given the current position of most practices, it appears that the need is to develop the current technology and/or migrate to a connected environment. This can be achieved by:

- Moving from DOS to a Windows-based environment, on the client side upgrading to Win 98 or 2000, and on the server side migrating to Windows NT 4.0
- Supporting new business applications, e.g. communications software, financials and accounting and good practice management system
- Allowing integration to other systems, e.g. virtual private network, intranet
- Providing access to the Internet.

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