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SUCCESS STORY

Challenges with complicated physician call schedules at Summit Medical Group solved using PerfectServe Synchrony™

Physician practice:
Summit Medical Group

Location: East Tennessee

Offices: 55

Physician staff: 220+

Summit Medical Group, a consortium of more than 220 doctors with independent offices across a 13-county area of greater Knoxville, Tennessee, needed a better solution to its traditional, human-centric answering service.

Coming on board as site manager of Summit's Farragut, Tennessee, location, Sairy Martocci knew the answer — PerfectServe. "I thought, if I'm ever in an office and need to change call service, I'm going to use PerfectServe. They know how to run an answering service."

The Farragut location is a four-physician office providing internal medicine for patients age 14 and up. The practice also has three full-time and one part-time nurse practitioners, and averages 600-700 patients a week from Farragut and nearby communities, including many older patients and retirees.

The challenge: An error-prone, antiquated system that exposes physicians' phone numbers

The four doctors in the Farragut office share on-call duties with seven doctors from three other Summit offices. That's where things get complicated. Since each office operates independently, office hours vary among locations, as do the holidays each office observes.

"We had an after-hours call service that took the calls and sent a text message to the doctor's cell phone," Sairy explains. "It was a human, manual process, and very antiquated. What makes it challenging is that one of the offices we

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share call with is open from 7:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., while we’re open from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. So that office takes its own calls between 4:00 and 5:00; then it rolls over to the answering service shared jointly with our office.”

But what kept happening, Sairy says, is that the calls between 4:00 and 5:00 — both emergency and nonemergency — were constantly misrouted to the Farragut office.

“It was constant, and a huge challenge,” she recalls. “My doctors would get calls when they weren’t on call, and ask me, ‘Why am I getting this?’ It would usually happen right around the time we were leaving. Luckily it didn’t happen at 3:00 a.m. very often.”

Sairy spent a lot of time working with the answering service to figure out why the errors kept occurring. However, the vendor was never able to explain or, more importantly, resolve the situation.

From the doctors’ perspective, there was an even bigger problem: there was no ability for the physicians to mask their cell phone numbers when returning patient calls. “Once the doctor called back, the patient had the doctor’s phone number, and the docs weren’t happy about that,” Sairy says.

The solution: A customized, intelligent platform that routes calls correctly and keeps physician info private

Once Summit signed on with PerfectServe, Sairy says, “It was a very smooth transition. PerfectServe helped with the onboarding to get everything transferred over and to work out the logistics between the separate offices.”

Getting buy-in from the doctors was relatively easy. At first, there was some pushback about adding something new on their cell phones. But once the doctors understood they could see exactly who was on call by using the app, and that their personal cell phone numbers would be kept private, they were on board.

Sairy reports that while the physicians are all 40-plus years of age and vary in their digital savvy, it took them no time at all to become proficient with the app. “Anytime we’ve ever had a problem, PerfectServe has been wonderful in responding.”

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She recalls that during the implementation phase, one doctor, who was on call, phoned her in a panic. He had waited until the last minute to download the PerfectServe mobile app and couldn't get the app to work. "The PerfectServe Help Center was great. They immediately got on a conference call with the doctor and helped get him where he needed to be. As PerfectServe walked our doctor through the app, they routed his calls to him a different way until his configuration was adjusted."

The result: Error-free call routing and happier patients who can connect quickly with their doctor

What happened to the infamous misdirected calls between 4:00 and 5:00 p.m.?

"Since we've had PerfectServe, we've gotten calls in that hour maybe once. It was a clock synchronization issue in the system; PerfectServe tweaked it for us, and it hasn't happened since."

Sairy said PerfectServe Synchrony made her job easier, too. "I can monitor after-hours activity and change the on-call schedule at any moment from anywhere."

In addition, Sairy says she's heard nothing but good things from the other three Summit sites using PerfectServe Synchrony. Adding new system rules and logic for call routing has been trouble-free as well, and that ability has improved both the relevance of patient calls and the response time of the physicians.

"The calls that come through now are actually appropriate," Sairy observes. "The old answering service sent through calls where someone would want to change their appointment, or they'd need a prescription refill for a controlled substance — things an on-call doctor can't help you with. PerfectServe is very good at weeding out those calls."

Patients appreciate getting connected to the right doctor right away.

"PerfectServe Synchrony tells the patient very clearly who the doctor on call is, thus eliminating the need for them to call us for that information," she explains. Sairy reports that with the previous answering service, patients would sometimes say they were treated rudely. With PerfectServe? "Not a single patient complaint," Sairy observes. "The patient gets a quick call back from the right doctor, and they appreciate that."