



# Technology's Increasing Role in Practice Management

*Patient Expectations, Need for Efficiency are Driving  
the Push for Automation*

Technology's reach within modern day dermatology practices extends well beyond electronic health records. As everyday life becomes increasingly automated, patients expect the same convenience from their healthcare providers. Further, as physicians are faced with staffing shortages and the burdens of government mandates, the need for operational efficiency is greater than ever.

While the benefits of an automated practice are alluring, the reality is that it takes significant time and expertise to integrate and support the various technological components needed today. Without access to an IT department, independent practices must choose between remaining analog or adding IT responsibilities to the already full plates of the physician owner or practice administrator.

## Communication and Convenience

Historically, healthcare has been slower to embrace technology than other industries, especially at the independent practice level. Patients seemingly accepted this. However, the Covid pandemic exacerbated individuals' reliance on technology, creating new expectations for how medical practices should operate.

A May 2021 survey of nearly 1,200 Americans highlights this change. That survey, conducted by SymphonyRM, found 48% percent would like more proactive communication from their healthcare providers on topics ranging from general health information to appointment reminders. In fact, 71% would be more likely to schedule a preventative care appointment if prompted by the provider. Further, the ability to schedule those appointments online also ranked high on patients' wish lists, with 58% wanting this capability.

Meeting these expectations is a key factor to retaining current patients and attracting new ones. QualDerm's IT department has been proactive in helping our affiliated practices integrate the digital tools to better communicate with patients as well as to enhance convenience and efficiencies. Every practice throughout the network has online bill pay capabilities and many practices offer online scheduling.

The IT department is also working with affiliated practices to allow patient forms to be completed and submitted digitally. The practices also have the ability to communicate with patients via text and email for appointment reminders as well as for general information.

### Patient Expectations of Medical Providers

- 48% desire more proactive communication
- 47% say communications via text and email boost their confidence in the provider
- 58% want online scheduling
- 45% would like virtual appointments
- 66% prefer to hear from their physician vs 34% who want info from retailers
- 17% are considering switching providers due to lack of communication
- 63% say digital communication capabilities is a factor when choosing a new physician

Source:  
SymphonyRM May 2021 survey of 1,192 Americans

Additionally, QualDerm creates and distributes regular patient email communications, tailored to each practice. These communications began during the early stages of the pandemic as a way to share relevant Covid health and safety information on a weekly basis. More recently, these have transitioned to a monthly schedule. The communications include general dermatology and skin cancer information as well as practice news. To date, network-wide QualDerm has distributed approximately 3.4 million of these communications. The consistently high email open rates, coupled with low unsubscribe requests, indicate that patients appreciate this engagement.

The QualDerm IT department was also instrumental in quickly setting up affiliated practices on a telehealth platform when Covid mandates required many dermatology practices to temporarily close. This allowed our affiliated practices to continue to care for their patients during the shutdowns and is still being used to provide an alternative to in-person appointments for more vulnerable patients.

## Integration and Pro-active Maintenance

The 2021 EHR Software Report compiled by Software Path found that solo practitioners spend an average of 9 weeks researching and selecting an EHR. Once the decision is made, the timeline to integrate an EHR for small medical practices can take a few weeks to more than six months.

EHRs are just one element of a modern dermatology practice's technology suite. Phones, faxes, computers, printers, websites, patient communication platforms, and telehealth systems all play a role in practice management today. Each of these technologies require ongoing attention to keep them functioning properly.

According to Josh Metzger, QualDerm's Vice President of IT and Security, "QualDerm doesn't force specific technologies on our affiliated practices. We work with each practice to determine their needs. Sometimes that means upgrading a current system or integrating a new one. QualDerm understands that each affiliated practice is unique, so we help them utilize the tools that are the best fit for them."

# QualDerm IT HELP DESK By the Numbers

800+

average IT Help Desk issues  
managed per month

11

number of hours / day  
Help Desk is staffed

2

number of Help Desk staff

1

number to call for any IT issue

"We want to help our affiliated practices use technology to be more efficient. If there is an IT issue, our team's goal is to help people get back to work more quickly."

— Josh Metzger  
QualDerm's Vice President of IT  
and Security

If a practice wants to transition to an EHR once they affiliate, QualDerm's IT team handles the entire transition, including onsite staff training. Currently, 96% of QualDerm affiliated practices utilize an EHR. Moving to an EHR allows practices to more efficiently report data as required by the federal government, allowing them to be eligible for reimbursement bonuses. What's more, it is beneficial for physician recruiting, as most new medical school graduates expect their future employer's practice to be automated.

In addition to taking care of immediate technology needs, QualDerm's IT team looks forward to ensure affiliated practices' systems are up-to-date and to identify new ways that technology can enhance operations. For example, phone systems are often overlooked unless there is a problem. However, the newer Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) systems offer several benefits over tradition land-line phones. Typically, phone systems should be replaced every 3-5 years – a task the QualDerm IT team pro-actively handles for its affiliated practices. Further, the IT team routinely conducts planned maintenance for the numerous technology systems used throughout the organization's network to ensure optimal functionality.

## Support and Security

While automating systems improves efficiencies and convenience for patients, technology can also cause staff frustration. Robert Half Technology conducted a study a few years ago that found across industries, workers spend 22 minutes daily dealing with IT issues. That equates to each employee losing two weeks' worth of productivity each year.

QualDerm has a team of 8 full-time IT professionals to who have the responsibility of overseeing all technology systems across the entire organization. This includes providing an IT Help Desk as a resource for affiliated practices. The Help Desk is staffed by 2 people who are available via phone and email 11 hours a day, 5 days a week. This allows affiliated practices' staffs to have a single source for all IT issues – for example, EHRs, phones, computers, and printers – rather than having to work with individual technology companies' help desks. The QualDerm Help Desk manages on average more than 800 requests per month, with most issues being resolved the same day. According to Metzger, "If there is an IT issue, our team's goal is to get people back to work as quickly as possible."

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The IT team also includes a dedicated EHR trainer who develops training materials and is onsite when affiliated practices go-live with a new EHR system. For ongoing support, affiliated practices have flexible options for remote or onsite training.

Over the last several years, IT teams have had to devote a significant amount of their time to securing their systems as data breaches and cyber hijackings have increased in frequency. In addition to following the latest best practices for technology security, the QualDerm IT team pro-actively monitors for potential leaks that could make the organization and its affiliated practices vulnerable. As part of this monitoring, the team does an annual audit to ensure staff members' passwords have not been compromised.

In addition to working to protect the organization from outside threats, the QualDerm IT team also helps safeguard against system downtime which could be caused by severe weather or other unforeseen circumstances. The team performs regular maintenance during nights and weekends so affiliated practices' work is not interrupted. The team also ensures there are redundancies for mission-critical systems, such as practices' phone systems and internet connections. To date, these efforts have allowed QualDerm to keep its technology systems up and running 99.9% of the time.

## About QualDerm Partners

QualDerm Partners helps top-tier dermatologists position their practices for sustainable growth and profitability. The company creates market-leading practice partnerships through affiliations and de novo development. QualDerm provides the management support, capital, and guidance for growth. Under QualDerm's True Partnership<sup>SM</sup> model, physicians are partners, not employees, and retain their own practice brand. This doctor-driven model is designed to maintain physicians' clinical autonomy and ensure the highest-quality patient care. QualDerm offers physicians tailored partnership structures to meet their needs, as well as the option to sell their practices.



QualDerm currently has 58 affiliated practices in North Carolina, South Carolina, Ohio, Tennessee, Virginia, Georgia, Pennsylvania, Delaware and New Jersey, with plans to expand further. For more information, visit [www.QualDerm.com](http://www.QualDerm.com).

To learn more about partnership opportunities or to discuss selling your practice, contact Ashley Johnson, Chief Development and Integration Officer at [ashley.johnson@qualderm.com](mailto:ashley.johnson@qualderm.com) or 615.250.6736.