

# New Visions in Health:

## The New



Ones and zeroes are good for your health. It's something Dr. Mel Cescon discovered after digitizing a few tons of paper medical records for his clinic's 12,000 patients. "For many years our physicians would take notes during visits," he says. "They'd scribble messages down in pencil or pen. It was difficult to read and virtually impossible to search." There was no way to review medical histories short of leafing through pages and deciphering scribbles. It took time and energy, which limited doctor-patient interaction. "Now I can search through records almost instantly, which gives me more time with my patients," says Cescon.

Cescon's clinic, New Vision Family Health Teams in Kitchener, Ontario, has more than 50 Macs running the Practice Solutions electronic medical record (EMR).

"There are many things we can do with electronic records that aren't possible with paper," says Cescon. That includes performing quick searches to track medical history and check for drug interactions, forwarding cases to specialists, plotting graphs, storing photographs, reviewing X-ray reports and faxing prescriptions — things that can benefit any physician, anywhere.

"It's really made things very efficient here and we have more time for health care," says Cescon. "That's due in large part to our Macs."

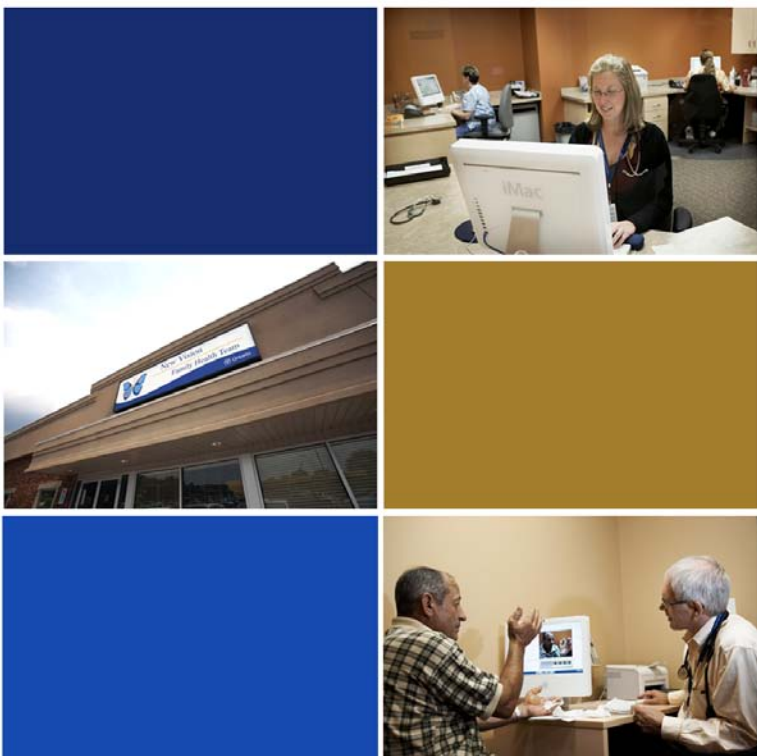
### Paper-ectomy

Paper occupies valuable space in a medical office. "Last summer we had 13 file cabinets full of paper," says Cescon. "More than 330 linear feet of it." And that's not the most paper Cescon has seen. The family physician has been in medicine for 30 years. During that time, he's shuffled enough paper to stretch from Vancouver to Halifax. That's why he decided to find a better way to deal with records.

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# Vision Kitchener FHT



“Compared to PCs, Macs are easier to learn,” he says. “That makes a big difference. The faster someone can learn, the sooner we can treat patients.” Stability was also key: No medical office should have computer problems while administering care. “Macs are reliable and that’s vital,” says Cescon.

His staff, along with outside help, scanned the paper records so they could be stored on the server. In a few months, New Vision was nearly paperless. The notes, letters, messages, progress reports and prescriptions now occupy bytes on an Xserve, not bulky file cabinets. All of the day-to-day information is data, and data, unlike paper, can be manipulated.

“With electronic records, you have the power of data at your disposal,” says Cescon. “If we receive new information from health officials, I can pull up patients who meet the criteria.” When policies for mammograms or colonoscopies change, Cescon can find patients who need the screenings and let them know to come in. “I can have a letter out to them in minutes,” says Cescon.

## Better Bedside

Databases are good at compiling info, but they don’t have great bedside manners. Still, they can be used in the exam room to great effect. Every room has an iMac running Practice Solutions. “We can generate graphs and tables easily,” says Cescon. “That helps our patients see what’s going on with their health.” When patients have chole-

sterol tests, it’s entered into their files. The results can be graphed to illustrate increases. “Or, if the patient is trying to lower cholesterol levels, I can show the progress,” says Cescon.

New Vision physicians can enter notes about symptoms during an exam, but they can also get visuals. “With the iMac’s built-in camera, we can take a snapshot right there,” says Cescon. “If they have a rash, we can take a picture and open it up in the EMR.” Snapshots can help if a physician needs to consult a specialist or if they want to visually track an ailment.

The doctors also track their patients’ progress from home using their own Macs. Cescon uses his MacBook Pro notebook to log into the EMR via a secure VPN. The network grants Cescon secure access to the records from virtually anywhere. “I can ... do all of my office work through my laptop because my business records and email are on it.”

Maintaining the VPN is painless. “We have almost no problems with the Mac network,” says Cescon. “It’s super-stable and that’s important.”

## Clear Communication

It’s not easy to coordinate a dozen staff members, eight physicians and 12,000 patients. If you want everything to run smoothly, you’ve got to keep in touch. Cescon’s Macs, and Practice Solutions, wire everyone together.

New Vision staff checks the EMR to see if patients are due for a checkups or follow-ups. They send the patient appointment reminders (via email or post) and relay schedules to doctors. When patients arrive, doctors enter info into the EMR with keyboard or voice-recognition software. If they need to call in a prescription, the EMR faxes prescriptions to the pharmacist. If they need a specialist, they can write a request in the application as well.”

The Macs also let the New Vision staff do their job more efficiently. “It’s easier to train someone on the Mac than it is on a PC,” says Cescon. “Our office staff learned how to use the new system quickly. They were able to get going much more quickly than if they were using PCs.”

“The Macs are intuitive,” says Jennifer Willsie, office manager at New Vision. “I never need to call in anyone from the vendor to train a new staff member. I do it myself.”

Only about 10% or 20% of medical offices in Canada having switched EMRs, Cescon says one of the barriers is ease of use. Convolutional systems only get in the way of health care. “The Macs and the EMR are so easy to use, so easy to learn,” says Cescon. “It’s a logical choice for any office and I hope more switch from paper records. It will help us all get more done.”