

CORAL GABLES

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J. Howard Miller

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The Scribe is in the House

HOW A GABLES PHYSICIAN CREATED A GROWING MEDICAL TRANSCRIPTION SERVICE

BY RICHARD WESTLUND

Fernando G. Mendoza, M.D., knows that not all advances in patient care come from the laboratory. The Coral Gables physician, who is board-certified in pediatrics and pediatric emergency care, recognized that doctors could spend more face-to-face time with their patients if they didn't have the tedious task of entering notes into electronic health records (EHRs).

In 2014, Dr. Mendoza founded Scrivas, LLC, which provides in-person and virtual medical scribe services to a growing number of South Florida hospitals and physician groups. "My goal was to improve the quality of care delivered to patients and the quality of life to physicians experiencing the burden of electronic health record requirements," he says. "Our medical scribes act as personal assistants to the physician."

The way it works is almost old fashioned, albeit wedded to modern IT. Initially the "scribe" – an almost Medieval term – comes into the emergency room with the doctor (it is still mostly an ER service). As the doctor describes his diagnosis, the scribe writes it down on an electronic pad and puts in the correct coding for billing.

Scrivas has now grown from serving a single emergency department to servicing multiple medical offices and healthcare networks in South Florida. Along with better patient care, the service provides financial benefits – since the doctor, now freed from excessive paperwork, can see 20 to 25 percent more patients.

"Using Scrivas' services have been helpful to our practice in two ways," says Jose E. Portuondo, M.D., an emergency physician at Doctors Hospital. By taking care of the documentation, they allow more time for patient interaction – and because scribes know the coding system for billings, costly errors are avoided. Today, Scrivas has about 300 scribes, primarily young professionals interested in medical or health-related careers, who work on site directly with physicians or, since Covid, remotely in a separate area.

The pandemic, rather than hurt business, actually helped expand revenues. Dr. Mendoza drew on his entrepreneurial instincts and talent base to offer private contact tracing services to businesses, schools and other organizations. The company's Covid Exposure Management Platform monitors and tracks infected, symptomatic, and exposed students, faculty, staff and employees. "We needed a tool that would complement our school protocols to help us trace and track any potential positive cases and identify possible outbreaks or hotspots on campus," says Vivian Bileca, director of True North Classical Academy in Miami. "Without Scrivas, it would be impossible to maintain the same level of teaching. [They helped] us remain open and bring back most of our students."

While the need for COVID-19 tracing is likely to disappear when effective vaccines arrive, South Florida physicians will continue to need medical scribe services. "Our company was born from a desire to improve the patient experience and deliver better clinical care," says Dr. Mendoza. "Being able to talk to a patient or family member without worrying about charting – that can make a big difference." ■



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FERNANDO G. MENDOZA, M.D., FOUNDER OF SCRIVAS, LLC (TOP, BOTTOM LEFT)