

# 5 Tech Trends Your Dermatology Practice Can Leverage Today

Dermatologists who review leading and upcoming trends can stay ahead of the curve.

BY ROBIN NTOH

To say that health information technology (HIT) is rapidly evolving is an understatement. As new solutions and technological advances emerge every day, it's becoming more challenging for dermatology practices to keep up with the trends and meet their patients' needs. But, by taking a pulse of healthcare technology and reviewing leading and upcoming trends, dermatologists and other specialty physicians can stay ahead of the game.

## 1. Increasing referrals and retention through data analytics and reporting

The opportunities for healthcare organizations to use data to drive decision-making and improve performance are rapidly expanding. In fact, the healthcare data marketplace is estimated to grow to more than \$34 billion by the end of 2022. Despite this forecast, dermatology practices have been surprisingly slow to embrace big data. In part, this is because these specialists have been focused on other priorities and are just now starting to turn their attention toward analytics.

This shift in focus generates many new opportunities for practices, including the ability to use analytics to monitor and respond to practice trends or shifts. For instance, providers may review patient retention data to determine how well they attract and retain customers. If patients are not returning to the practice on a consistent basis, they may recognize the need for better communication—including marketing efforts—and more consistent interaction between appointments.

In the same way that practices review analytics for internal shifts, providers also use data insights to monitor shifts that result from external factors. Many providers who make use of such insights monitor their referral statistics to determine whether they remain steady over time. This is because refer-

---

“In the same way that practices review analytics for internal shifts, providers also use data insights to monitor shifts that result from external factors. Many providers who make use of such insights monitor their referral statistics to determine whether they remain steady over time.”

---

ral rates are especially important with the dynamic mergers and acquisitions environment that has developed within the healthcare industry and is impacting dermatologists.

Consider the independent primary care practice that is a chief referring organization for a dermatology practice. Should that primary practice be purchased by a larger health system, it will likely shift its referrals to a dermatology practice under the parent organization—resulting in a decline in referrals for the original physician. By monitoring the referral metric, specialty practices can spot and react to trends early, giving them the opportunity to expand their referral base to compensate for any negative effects from changing landscapes or other external factors.

## 2. Embracing cloud technology to increase flexibility

Over the last few years, the popularity of cloud-based technology has grown exponentially. HIMSS Analytics reports that more than 90 percent of healthcare providers

perceive value in cloud services both now and in the future, and those dermatology practices that choose to leverage cloud technologies can reap the many benefits they can provide. For example, practices can reduce the amount of IT department involvement needed when they choose web-based solutions over traditional options, including on-premise servers. Moreover, cloud-based technology gives practices the benefits of anytime access to their patient data and automatic real-time updates, which saves time, money and ensures their technology is always current. Cloud-based solutions automatically back up data on a consistent basis, so an organization does not have to rely on staff to remember to perform the backup. These solutions also ensure continuity when onsite computers are damaged or destroyed in unexpected events, such as natural disasters.

As with any technology, cloud-based technology comes with its own imperfections. For cloud solutions, the most inherent risk is the contingency upon internet availability—if the network is down, the program is, too. Practices can mitigate interruptions in service by investing in reliable, consistent and fast networks with internet backups, where possible.

### 3. Preserving data privacy and security

The healthcare industry has one of the highest incidences of identity theft, so preventing data and security breaches should rank highly among the top priorities for dermatologists. A critical step providers can take to keep data safe is to implement solutions that have robust security protocols automatically built into the system. For example, such software can prevent practice staff from seeing a patient's social security number unless authorized. Similarly, the system can restrict the visibility of patient records to certain staff members on an as-needed basis. If a solution accepts credit card payments, it must be Peripheral Component Interconnect (PCI) and Europay, MasterCard and Visa (EMV) compliant—guidelines that aim to protect cardholder information and prevent fraud. These solutions do not allow practice staff to see the full credit card number and substantially cut down the risk of theft.

One key for practices to increase security is to ensure the practice closely follows the system's security protocols. For example, if the technology company advises users to change their passwords when specified and to employ a combination of alpha-numeric characters and symbols in the passwords, staff should heed such recommendations. If they don't, they elevate risk.

### 4. Preparing for MACRA

The Medicare Access and CHIP Reauthorization Act (MACRA)—the bipartisan legislation that aims to propel organizations toward value-based care—is a trend that isn't

## BY THE NUMBERS

**\$34B** The healthcare data marketplace is estimated to grow to more than \$34 billion by the end of 2022, according to [healthitanalytics.com](http://healthitanalytics.com).

**90%** HIMSS Analytics reports that more than 90 percent of healthcare providers perceive value in cloud services both now and in the future, reports [Forbes.com](http://Forbes.com).

**#1** The healthcare industry is the most cyber attacked, with a high incidence of identity theft, according to a report at [csoonline.com](http://csoonline.com).

**January 1** Be sure all staff are aligned on MACRA strategy for 2018.

going away anytime soon. To stay ahead of MACRA updates in the coming year, providers should verify their technology platforms are certified to meet compliance measures in 2018 and will streamline the attestation process. Next, each practice should determine which measures it plans to report on for 2018 and how it will submit those metrics—via claims, direct EHR or registry. Even though an organization may collect and submit the same metrics in the same format as it did in 2017, it is helpful to discuss the plan for 2018 with the staff to ensure everyone is aligned come January 1.

### 5. Closing the door on paper

From bank statements to restaurant bills, almost everyone is going paperless. While numerous dermatology practices have onboarded electronic health records (EHRs), many are still heavily reliant on paper in other areas—holding onto historic records and relying on paper consent forms. Joining the paperless trend can foster efficiency, reduce risk and elevate the patient experience. Practices that go paperless can integrate technology such as scanners (instead of copiers) and signature pads to streamline the transition. These tools can often integrate directly with the practice management (PM) or EHR solution, which improves information accessibility to those who need it.

### COMMIT TO SEIZE OPPORTUNITIES

When practices stay abreast of technological innovations and trends, they can facilitate better patient care and streamline operations. Making a commitment to seize these opportunities is the first step in optimizing current performance and successfully navigating the future. ■

*Robin Ntoh is Senior Professional Services Consultant at Nextech. More information is available at [Nextch.com](http://Nextch.com)*

