



Order of Malta Clinic of Northern California

Nonprofit Powers Up from Paper to Telehealth – at Viral Speed

Complimentary preventative health care services for uninsured and low-income patients, with no questions asked. Is this too good to be true? Not at the [Order of Malta Clinic](#) of Northern California in Oakland. This clinic has been upholding human dignity and care for people in need for more than a decade.

A lay group within the Catholic Church, the Order was founded more than 900 years ago to run a hospital in Jerusalem for pilgrims of all faiths. Today, the Order runs a clinic staffed by more than 50 volunteers, including physicians, nurse practitioners, nurses, and administrators. For thousands of uninsured or underinsured people in the Bay Area, it is their only source of medical care. Best of all, there's never a bill or a co-pay.

Challenge: Eliminate Paper

With such a varied cadre of volunteer talent, the clinic started out with the simplest possible documentation system - namely paper. Doctors from different specialties, including retirees, were well-accustomed to taking paper notes. Administrative volunteers could easily file paper documents without software training.

But as the clinic grew, so did its problems with paper. Predictably, documents got lost. "I often spent an hour a day trying to chase down mislaid folders, notes or orders," says Anne Brussok, C.Ped., clinic office manager and member of the Order. "This was frustrating, to say the least. My experience in the corporate world had taught me what a difference the right software system could make. So, I was eager to modernize."



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Office Manager, Order of Malta Clinic



Solution: A Gift of Kareo

When one of the clinic's board of directors arranged for a Kareo installation, Brussok became an early adopter. She championed the initial set up for the clinic and was its first user.

"Immediately, we saw the benefits of having an electronic patient database," she explains. "Before, we sometimes had trouble even locating a patient's phone number. With Kareo, all the data we need is just a click or two away."

"Having an electronic appointment system brought speedy benefits too," Brussok continued. "Before, we were setting up appointments in Microsoft Outlook, a stand-alone system that prevented us from coordinating with patient records. Now, we have a complete view of records when making appointments, so we can be more knowledgeable and efficient in our communications."

Result: Saving Space, Saving Time

The clinic has 1,700 active patients, and thousands more whose records are archived. With only 1,800 square feet, the clinic had run out of room to store paper files. Thanks to Kareo, filing cabinets will soon be a thing of the past.

Staff members are seeing improvements across the board. "Doctors like the convenience of electronic prescriptions, notes and lab orders," Brussok says. "Remote access to the system means that they can cut down on trips to the clinic. And they can do so with confidence, knowing that Kareo's system is HIPAA compliant." The clinic started using Kareo for internal emails and document transfers. "The messaging system is amazing, making it so much easier for our team to communicate and collaborate," Brussok notes.

Gone are the days when people ran around the office searching for documents. "With Kareo, it sometimes seems like we can find information at the speed of light," she says. "That frees up a lot of time. Overall, I'd estimate that Kareo has enhanced efficiencies for staff by about 20 percent."

Challenge: Pandemic Problems

The Order of Malta Clinic was still in the early phases of Kareo adoption when disaster struck. "COVID-19 changed everything in a heartbeat," Brussok notes. "I still can't believe how quickly it all happened. With strict shelter-in-place

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restrictions, neither patients nor practitioners could come into the clinic like normal. Yet, people still had important health care needs. It was essential that we find a way to address them.”

Solution: Telehealth at “Warp Speed”

The clinic discovered that it already had the tools it needed in Kareo. “We’d been taking baby steps with Kareo, implementing the basics before we started exploring the system in depth. Suddenly, with pandemic restrictions, we needed greater functionality in a hurry, especially telehealth. Fortunately, we had this incredible tool at our fingertips. All we needed to do was decide to use it,” says Brussok.

“We adopted Kareo telehealth at warp speed, and are currently conducting all patient interactions virtually,” she continues. “Thanks to Kareo, our doctors were able switch to phone or video consultations right away. With records stored digitally in the Kareo database, doctors working remotely can view patient histories just as if they are in the office. It’s also easy for them to order lab tests or prescriptions electronically through Kareo while off-site. We never could have done all this with our old paper-dependent system. We would have simply ground to a halt.”

Result: Comprehensive Remote Capabilities

What do the Order’s patients think of telehealth with Kareo? “Our remote service has been a real comfort to people,” says Brussok. “Everyone is afraid right now while the virus is still so active, and nobody wants to go to a hospital or clinic for fear of getting infected. They’re even afraid to call 911 or go to the emergency room.

But serious health issues don’t disappear just because a virus is present,” Brussok continued. “A large percentage of our patients are insulin dependent, for instance. They often cannot put off seeing a doctor when problems arise. That’s why telehealth is such a blessing. Our patients really appreciate being able to get medical care when they need it – without even leaving their home -- and are thankful that we shifted to telehealth so rapidly.”

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Conclusion: Transition to the Future

The Order of Malta Clinic plans to adopt more of Kareo's features when shelter-in-place is over, including the patient portal for online scheduling and patient-staff communications, and video conferencing.

"We're still scratching the surface of what we can do with our software," Brussok says. "It's great to know that the features we need are right there, ready and waiting for us in Kareo."

"Kareo has proved to be an incredible medical record-keeping software – and so much more," she adds. "Kareo is helping us expand our vision, spend more time with patients, and provide even more comprehensive services to those in need."

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