

Documentation capture, Healthcare AI

How a busy medical practice saves correspondence time by using speech recognition

[Dr. Simon Wallace](#) | Chief Clinical Information Officer (CCIO), Nuance Healthcare UK and Ireland

October 11, 2023



A team of six rheumatologists at Brisbane's ArthritisCARE treats patients with complex cases of arthritis and other musculoskeletal conditions. Working with around 7,000 patients every year, the team has to handle many admin tasks, from documenting diagnoses and treatment to writing detailed letters to GPs. Inspired by seeing the speed and ease with which dyslexic students used speech recognition to complete their homework, ArthritisCARE's business manager knew the technology could help the practice's specialists streamline their correspondence.

A 2018 Australian Bureau of Statistics survey reported that [arthritis affects around one in seven people](#)—that's 3.6 million Australians who live in pain and with reduced mobility because of the condition. The impacts aren't only physical; [a fifth of Australians with arthritis also experience high levels of psychological distress](#), which significantly affects their family life and mental health.

If arthritis is detected in its early stages, lifestyle changes and [medical treatments](#) can reduce the effects of the illness and lead to better patient outcomes. But, because arthritis is slow to develop, symptoms can take several years to become severe enough to cause the patient to seek help. Should [surgery to relieve pain or restore movement](#) be required, [long waiting lists](#) can lead to further delays in care.

With patients' long-term quality of life at stake, rheumatology practices are under pressure to treat people with arthritis faster. And anything that can be done to speed up processes—without compromising quality—can make a real difference.

Patients expect their GPs and specialists to keep comprehensive records of diagnosis, treatments, and progress when dealing with a chronic illness like arthritis. However, clinicians have to spend time

completing another essential form of documentation to a high standard: referral letters.

GP referral letters give specialists vital context when seeing a patient for the first time. The return letter from the specialist lets the GP know what action has been taken—and what needs to happen next.

When arthritis patients are in pain and desperate to see progress in treating their condition, delays in turning around these letters can have a profound impact. But what causes delays, and what can be done to speed up the process?

Tackling correspondence at a busy Brisbane practice

ArthritisCARE is a Brisbane medical practice that specialises in patient care for inflammatory arthritis and associated auto-immune diseases. Each year, the six rheumatologists at the busy practice see 7,000 patients and generate 13,000 letters.

To draft these letters, the practice would typically use a typist to transcribe a voice recording made by the specialist. If the typist needs to check some patient details or medical terminology with the specialist, it can take up to five days to complete a letter and send it to the referring doctor. These delays keep the patient waiting and unable to schedule the next step in their treatment.

Barbara Landsberg, ArthritisCARE's Business Manager, was already aware of the benefits of Nuance's Dragon software—having observed the ease with which dyslexic students used it to complete their homework in a previous role. But could speech recognition also overcome the accuracy problems her clinic was experiencing with manual transcription?

To find out, Barbara convinced her colleagues to try [Dragon Medical One](#).

“We're sending out referral letters in hours, not days”

The first thing that struck specialists at ArthritisCARE was the accuracy of Dragon's medical dictionary.

As Barbara explained, “It contains a comprehensive list of correctly spelled medical terms that cover many specialty areas—including rheumatology. And the dictionary can be customised by adding specific words and phrases used within the ArthritisCARE practice.”

In fact, because Dragon Medical One is so accurate, specialists only need to make minimal edits to letters. This doesn't just reduce stress and frustration—it saves more time.

Eliminating the need to manually transcribe a voice recording has meant that letters are on their way within hours of the consultation. Even if they're three or four pages long, using Dragon Medical One can ensure that letters arrive well before the patient's next appointment with their GP.

And by removing the expense of a typist, the practice has seen annual savings of \$40,000 for each specialist who uses Dragon Medical One.

How speech recognition benefits specialists as well as patients

As well as using speech recognition to speed care for patients, ArthritisCARE was also keen to see if the technology could bring well-being benefits to specialists.

Compared to their peers in other regions, [Australian healthcare professionals are more likely to report a healthy work-life balance](#). Dragon Medical One supports this balance by helping clinicians create letters and other documentation anywhere and at any time—using a secure, cloud-based speech platform that's compatible across solutions, platforms, and devices.

One of ArthritisCARE's specialists now fits writing letters around her busy home life with a young family. Dragon Medical One has given her the freedom to create her letters whenever and wherever suits her—immediately after a consultation, in the afternoon, from the car while she's on the road, or from home in the evening.

“Dragon Medical One has been invaluable for us, not only because it has saved the practice a considerable amount of money, but because it has helped re-energise our specialist,” said Barbara. “She is no longer swamped by time-consuming and inefficient document processes and is free to spend more of her valuable time where it matters most—with her patients and family.” Read the case study to discover what Dragon Medical One can do for your practice's patients and specialists.

Tags: [Clinician wellbeing](#)



About Dr. Simon Wallace

Dr. Simon Wallace is the Chief Clinical Information Officer (CCIO) of Nuance's Healthcare division in the UK and Ireland. Simon has worked as a GP, hospital and public health doctor in Brighton and London. His interest in health informatics began in the 90s when he spent a year at the King's Fund investigating the impact of the internet on shared decision making between patients and their healthcare professional. For the past 15 years, he has worked for a range of organisations including Bupa, Dr Foster, Cerner Corporation and GSK across a range of technologies which include electronic patient records, telemedicine, mobile health and lifestyle devices. Simon has a keen interest in the voluntary sector, recently completing a 7 year term as a Trustee for Fitzrovia Youth in Action, a children and young people's charity based in London.

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