



# QualDerm Partners' VP Talks Scaling a Physician Network, Leveraging Patient Engagement, and Responding to COVID-19

## INTRO

Specialty physician networks, like QualDerm Partners, located just south of Nashville, TN, offer physicians the freedom to focus on the clinical aspect of their practices while teams that specialize in operations, communication, IT, and billing handle these processes in the background. It's a win-win for both parties, especially if a physician engages with an organization with a core focus on quality and a commitment to physician autonomy, like QualDerm Partners.

We recently had the opportunity to hear from Josh Metzger, QualDerm's VP of IT and Security. He shared with us what makes QualDerm's organizational needs unique, how they found Relatient, and what they've been able to accomplish with Relatient's patient engagement platform, including their response to COVID-19.

## Q&A

**Relatient: Tell me about QualDerm as an organization, how are you structured and why is that important?**

**Metzger:** There's a lot of different ways people describe organizations like QualDerm, but "partnership network" is probably the best term to describe who we are. Physicians chose to affiliate with QualDerm because of our reputation for quality and a True Partnership. After affiliating with QualDerm, physicians maintain their clinical autonomy while we handle the practice management duties to help enhance efficiency and increase patient access to care. We aren't there to tell them how to care for their patients, we work side-by-side with them, to help them with the part of running a practice that they don't really love, so they can spend their time focusing on treating their patients.



Q&A CONT.

**Relatient: How did you decide to start looking for a new patient engagement partner and how did Relatient make the list?**

**Metzger:** We had been using another vendor for quite awhile, but we didn't have the support we needed. Our system often went down and there were a lot of mistakes. I had seen Relatient at Nextech's annual EDGE conference and started talking with some folks there to learn more, but I was also hearing about Relatient from some of our newly-affiliated practices who were already working with Relatient and didn't want to make a change.

**Relatient: How does QualDerm's size and structure change what you need or require from vendors?**

**Metzger:** I have a colleague who loves the Henry Ford quote about having any color Model T you want, as long as it's black. It kind of applies here in that scalability is really important because we are constantly growing. We need someone who can help us scale easily so if we grow by 50%, it doesn't create 50% more upkeep of our patient communication system, too. We're always working to find balance between scalability and flexibility. Sometimes our physicians want to be able to customize pieces of their setup and we want to provide that, because QualDerm's partnership model is not cookie-cutter, we work closely with each practice to meet their individual needs – Relatient helps us do that. A lot of their patients have been seeing them for 30-40 years, who are we to come in and say, "We know how to talk to your patients better than you?" And finally, we need speed. One year we closed 7-8 practices in one year, so we need the ability to turn around new go-lives quickly while still meeting our high-quality standards.

**Relatient: Let's talk about COVID-19, how did it impact QualDerm and your patients, and how did you respond?**

**Metzger:** Our leadership team really got out in front of COVID-19. When a lot of people thought it wasn't going to be anything, they saw that it would be and got a jump on it. We used Relatient's Demand Messaging module to communicate tactically and quickly with patients. We implemented telehealth across our network in 2 weeks through a lot of late nights and training sessions. We used Demand Messaging to help patients move to telehealth, change their appointments, communicate new schedules or information about clinics that had temporarily closed. We also used this feature to share our initial COVID-19 safety procedures and we continue to share these updates as the COVID-19 situation evolves. We worked together with our physicians to ensure patients with the most urgent needs, such as melanoma, could get treated right away. We then worked to transition other patients who were seeking treatments for things like acne or psoriasis from in-person appointments to telehealth appointments. Some folks opted to postpone their appointments, so we used Relatient to stay in communication with those patients to get them rescheduled. Those are just a few examples, but Relatient was critical in helping QualDerm communicate important information to patients without having to physically call every single patient.



Q&A CONT.

**Relatient: What were the biggest challenges QualDerm was seeking to address with the switch to Relatient?**

**Metzger:** Consistency of the system itself. We had a lot of trouble with our previous vendor, but it was difficult to figure out where and why the problems were occurring. We didn't have that issue with Relatient. That was a big win for me, right out of the gate, not having to chase down which reminders went out and which ones didn't. Relatient's system also allows for better reporting, it's much easier to get into the system and run a report to see why a patient didn't receive their message/reminder. Most of the time, they did receive it and we can even grab the recording. Relatient is also more tightly integrated with Nextech, which means we can automatically mark patients as confirmed. Before we had to program 100% of that in-house. We would have to generate a report (from the reminder system), it was usually wrong, and then import confirmations and things like that into Nextech. Relatient has an API integration so we were able to turn off all the workarounds we had to use before.

**Relatient: QualDerm started with Appointment Reminders but has since expanded their strategy with Relatient. How did you decide what to add and how to prioritize?**

**Metzger:** After appointment reminders, we added no-show reengagement first because it was a natural extension of appointment reminders. Once we got the no-show rate down, we wanted to let the patients who did miss an appointment know they missed it and get them back on the schedule. Now we're working on eRegistration, which is something we always thought would be really nice but had prioritized for later down the road. Then COVID-19 happened and it created a big push for this. We realized we don't want to be passing a lot of papers and clipboards back and forth and having a process that's really high touch. It's also a lot less work on the front desk staff. We're piloting it in our Tennessee practices first. After that, we'll push it out to the rest of the network.

**Relatient: What are some of the changes QualDerm has seen since moving to Relatient?**

**Metzger:** At the practice level, they love the control that they didn't have before. Staff can control a lot from the portal, like when they need to move an entire list of a certain doctor's patients—they can use Demand to get critical updates out quickly. Before they would have had to get a list, pass it around, and have the staff start calling patients. COVID-19 created such a volume of work that we just wouldn't have been able to get it done with manual calls. Being able to send a text and get an instant response is really, really nice. Relatient allows the practices an easy way to independently and efficiently control patient communication.