

IT Support for Medical Practices



Sheryl Cherico
CEO, COO & Co-Founder

CEOCFO: Ms. Cherico, what is the idea behind Tier3MD?

Ms. Cherico: Tier3 provides IT support for medical practices. It is beneficial to practices that have an in-house staff and need supplemental support, and some that may not be large enough to employ a full-time IT staff.

CEOCFO: What do you understand on a fundamental level about working with medical practices that maybe others do not realize quite as well?

Ms. Cherico: What comes to mind first is the difference in the medical practice as opposed to a lawyer's office. Understanding the medical industry as a whole is a very important part of supporting a medical practice. Medical practices are completely different. They use an EMR, diagnostic equipment, and medical devices that interface with their medical software. They are providing patient care at a very high level, and the importance of all the devices working and working properly is critical to quality patient care.

CEOCFO: How do you engage with your clients?

Ms. Cherico: We meet with the practice manager as often as possible, and they use our knowledge as a way of improving technology in their office. They like to talk to someone who understands medical. I can walk into someone's office and know everything they have in there – what they use, how they use it, and what they can do better. There is a comfort level because we are so knowledgeable about the medical industry.

CEOCFO: Do you come in on an as-needed basis?

Ms. Cherico: The easiest for us to do is a recurring monthly service contract. What this does is allows us to be proactive without nickel and diming the customer. We monitor the systems 24/7, so if we see something we do not have to wait for approval, charge an hourly rate or do a quote, we just go out there and take care of it. Being proactive is extremely important, and I find that in the break/fix model proactive maintenance completely lacks.

CEOCFO: Do most medical practices realize they should have that level?

Ms. Cherico: I see the change over the years. At first, they really did not know why they needed IT because they had the practice manager's son come in after work and move computers around. I think with the emergence of the electronic health records and incentives given to adopt electronic health records, it has brought an awareness to the IT support. Doctors have gone from low tolerance to no tolerance on down time. They can be seeing a patient, and if their systems are down, that is trouble. They are starting to realize now, and I have seen the change over the years of the importance of a stable network.

CEOCFO: Do you find that even if there is an IT person on premise that medical practices are starting to see the need to have an outside service as well?

Ms. Cherico: Absolutely, and there are a couple reasons for that. One is the single IT person kind of works in a vacuum. They do not know everything, and they cannot do everything. They are becoming aware of this. If the IT person leaves, goes on vacation, takes a couple days off or is out of touch for whatever reason, that practice could suffer. They are really starting to realize the importance of having backup and stability, plus an outsourced IT company most likely has an infrastructure that a practice really cannot afford to have. We have a private cloud, and a lot of IT companies have private clouds to back up their clients' data. To answer your question, when I first started this company in 2005 I was really convincing them of the value of outsourcing. Now they come to me and they see it. I find very few practices right now that have an in-house IT staff.

CEO CFO: *How do you keep up not only with the changes in technology but with the changes in regulation?*

Ms. Cherico: That is my job. I take that on. I want to make sure that we are not only on top, but ahead of the curve. Being an IT company, the last thing that I want to happen is something go on with one of my clients that my company was unaware of. As the CEO, I take full responsibility for that. A lot of what I do to keep up is education. I am constantly taking exams, getting new certifications, going to trade shows, going to lectures and reading. I do a pretty decent job of staying on top of it.

CEO CFO: *How do you know what to keep on your radar screen with upcoming technologies?*

Ms. Cherico: By reading the government websites, for one. That is a great way to keep up with what is going on with the HHS, the Department of Health and Human Services, the Office of Civil Rights, the Inspector General, those are all places that you can go to get your information. You have to read and stay on top of it, listen to other experts in the field, and whatever you need to do to keep educating yourself. I receive publications, I receive magazines, I write for magazines, and I try to make sure that I am a subject expert.

CEO CFO: *Are your customers taking advantage of all your offerings?*

Ms. Cherico: I would like to see more practices do security risk assessments. The payoff for us as a company is very small compared to the benefits that the client gets. I think that you not only need to do security assessments for government incentives, but for best practices. If you have electronic protected health information that is ePHI, you need to protect that data. The first time you get a breach, you are going to realize how much you did not do to protect that data. It is so easy to get those policies in place, get those systems analyzed and to take the measures needed to keep your network secure.

“I am proud of Tier3MD’s accomplishments over the last 9 years. We provide a service that helps medical practices focus on quality patient care. For that, I am proud and thankful.” - Sheryl Cherico

CEO CFO: *Are you surprised even with all the talk about security and security threats that companies in general do not seem to want to go that extra step?*

Ms. Cherico: I see that, and I think it is a lack of education. I think there are scared, and I think they think that if they get the security they are going to find all kinds of things that are wrong. Basically, you are, but that is not uncommon. I have interviewed practice managers where I have asked if they had a policy in place for when they terminate an employee, and they say they have the policy but when I ask to see it they say it is not written down. It is just a matter of writing it down and documenting what happens when an employee leaves. Office managers sometimes get a little protective because they are afraid that I am telling them they are not doing their job, and that is not the case. I am helping them protect their processes.

CEO CFO: *It seems that in all industries people just do not get the security!*

Ms. Cherico: I do lunch and learns, I post blogs, I write things and I have webinars. I have my Tier3MD website blog, and I comment on other blogs. I know they are reading and posting. I am trying to motivate people and make them aware of the security.

CEO CFO: *Are there particular types of practices or sizes that would be using your service?*

Ms. Cherico: We have always worked from the single doctor up to 100 doctors. It does not make a difference. There is no limit as to who needs our services. What I would like to do more, and this is something I would like to get into, is that we work with a medical center here that find practices. That seems to be the trend where a lot of hospitals are buying the practices. We do the support for the practices that they buy, because hospital IT is different. I would like to get more involved in being like a Geek Squad type service for the hospitals to support the practices that they are buying. They all have their legacy systems in there, but the hospital staff has no idea how to support.

CEO CFO: *Do they tend to keep you on if they are buying a practice that you are already with, or do they just clean house and start from scratch?*

Ms. Cherico: No, we have actually been staying. They have been buying larger groups, and they are finding out that the hospital just does not have the resources or the knowledge to support the practice.

CEO CFO: *Do you need to go on premise often because of the equipment or are you able to handle most of that remotely?*

Ms. Cherico: Most of it is done remotely, but we still like to go on site. We will take a day to go on site and just spend it with that client and ask what they need. We take a little list of tickets and we go out there and handle them personally. I do not want to lose that personal touch.

CEOCFO: Do you find that the office staff that you are dealing with tends to tell you what is going on?

Ms. Cherico: When I go into an office, I cannot tell you how many times I have seen the taskbar on the bottom on the side or up at the top or somewhere else on their monitor. I will ask if they put it there, and they will say no and they did not know what happened. I go ahead and drag it and show them what to do if it happens again. Sometimes I will walk through an office and see someone doing something, and then I will give them a suggestion. This is the part of the job myself and all my staff like best!

CEOCFO: What is your geographic range today?

Ms. Cherico: It is national.

CEOCFO: How do you find your people? What are the intangibles over and above the technical skills?

Ms. Cherico: A lot of times, I will get people who already work in a medical office who will call me and want to work with us. If it is not a client, I can hire them. If it is a client, I would not take their IT staff. Every time I hire, I try to find someone who has one skill that no one on our team has. We are extremely diverse, and that is what I need. I cannot have everybody who knows the same thing.

CEOCFO: What surprised you as the business has grown and developed?

Ms. Cherico: That I have to run a business. I am a network engineer. I started off being a network engineer, and I did not start off having employees, accountants, lawyers and buildings. I do not have an MBA. I have Microsoft certification, health care certification and security certification. I am like my doctors in a sense. My doctors go out and practice medicine to become a business owner, and I go through some of the same aches and pains they go through.

CEOCFO: Tell us about the move to mobile and how you are helping your clients with that.

Ms. Cherico: We have a product for mobile device management where we connect it and put it on your devices. That allows us to wipe it away if you lose it and encrypt it if it is not an encrypted. I cannot stress enough to my clients to get some kind of mobile device management. I went to an industry conference a few years back, and the HHS director was the speaker. The first thing they said was each person has five devices that the IT department needs to secure. I myself have six. They have their desktop PC, they laptop PC, an iPad, probably an iPhone, and then they may have some kind of Mac computer.

CEOCFO: Why is giving back important for your company?

Ms. Cherico: Because I am nothing without my employees. I am nothing without the team that surrounds me. They are the most important part of this company, I am not. I could go away today and this company could run without me. In terms of charities, I am a breast cancer survivor, and the incoming President for the Georgia Breast Cancer Coalition. I do the Susan Komen walk because it is an experience, but I am also very involved in animal rescue. I am on the board of directors for Lifeline Animal Project. It is a \$7 million 501C3, and we manage the largest animal shelters in Georgia. We have dropped the euthanasia rate by 60 percent at least, if not more. Animals and breast cancer are my passions.

CEOCFO: What is next for Tier3? What might be different a year from now?

Ms. Cherico: A year from now, I want to more physical offices nationally. I have hired a new president of development of business strategies who has been with me since March, and he is working on that national program. Since he has been with us, he has opened up Oklahoma, and we are working very closely to try and expand into other cities. I am looking to acquire small IT companies. I think that is the best way, instead of starting from scratch.

CEOCFO: Put it all together for our readers. Why choose Tier3MD?

Ms. Cherico: Because I think we are the gold standard in medical grade IT support. We are one of the few who actually focuses on the medical industry as a whole.

Interview conducted by: Lynn Fosse, Senior Editor, CEOCFO Magazine



Tier3MD

**For more information visit:
www.tier3md.com**

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