



Mastering Clinical Photography

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CLINICAL PHOTOGRAPHY

Improving quality and consistency of your medical photos

**Company Name:**

AppwoRx LLC

Industry:

*Medical Technology
Clinical Photography
mHealth
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Year Founded

2011

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In 2011, Dr. Ariel Soffer and I formed AppwoRx with the intention of revolutionizing the field of clinical photography. We developed a software platform which is used daily by physicians and clinicians around the world. Our mobile application and cloud based photo management tools streamline the process of capturing, cataloging and managing clinical photos. I have been involved in all aspects of the development, training process and implementation of our software.


When I began training doctors to use AppwoRx, I strictly focused on how to use the features of the software. The training did not include any advice on how to stage a photo; I naively assumed that this was taught to physicians and healthcare workers in their respective classes. As I began working with more customers, I noticed that many of the photos taken were of poor quality. Very little thought was given to lighting, positioning, shadow or background.

I discovered that support staff of the physicians looked at clinical photography as a cumbersome task which slowed them down or impeded their to get patients to the checkout desk. Most clinicians were not being taught the importance of taking proper photos or the benefit to both patient and doctor. A good quality photo could be used for “before and after” results and increase the patients’ overall satisfaction, as well as be used as a framework for the procedures. AppwoRx would truly need to do more than educate our clients on the use of our clinical software; we would need to teach them how to take a good picture.

I’ve put together a list of tips and best practices that I have gathered from working with a wide range of physicians and clinicians. These processes and procedures should be helpful to any area of practice which relies on photography to assist with diagnosis, treatment or insurance reimbursements.

Christopher L. Cabell
Co-Founder & CTO



A hand in a light blue sleeve holds a large, stylized white cloud graphic against a blue gradient background. The cloud has a thick white outline and a smaller, lighter blue cloud inside it.

The most effective means to improve photo quality throughout an entire organization is to make individuals accountable for the quality of the photos that he/she takes

*Dr. Ariel Soffer, M.D., FACC
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SETTING STANDARDS

If you want to improve the quality of your clinical photos, implementing standards and accountability within your organization is paramount to success. If your practice has not defined what the acceptance criteria is for medical photography, then your staff has no baseline on which to assess the quality of a patient image.

Very few offices who use photography in their practice have actually created a well defined list of standards. Because requirements vary based on physician preferences or insurance requirements, we recommend

that the physician meet with their staff to discuss exactly what is required from a series of photos. Some questions to consider: Once you have defined what is expected of your team, you should create a reference document for your team and you should have this document handy wherever the photography will occur.

Giving your team a quick and accessible reference guide for clinical photography will help them to produce better quality photos because they will know what is expected.

- ❓ Where will we be photographing our patients?
- ❓ Will we be using one exam room for all photography, or will we use multiple exam rooms?
- ❓ If multiple exam rooms, how will we ensure consistency?
- ❓ What will we be using for a background?
- ❓ What specific photo series will we take for a particular diagnosis or procedure?
- ❓ What is the optimal patient position for each photo?
- ❓ What is the optimal distance for each photo?
- ❓ How are we ensuring that our before and after photos are consistent?

ADDING ACCOUNTABILITY TO PHOTOGRAPHY



The most effective means I have found to improve photo quality quickly and across an entire organization is to make individuals accountable for the quality of the photos they take. This can be best accomplished by reviewing actual photos with the photographer in an individual or group setting. This will allow you to coach your team based on actual photo sets, not concepts.

It is best to review existing patient photos and create an agenda before any training or coaching the photographer. I suggest finding one or two patients with photos taken by the staff member which are of good quality. Use these high quality photos as an example of the type of photos they should be consistently taking. Starting with positive feedback will set the tone for the meeting so that the photographer is not defensive.

Next, move on to show patient photo sets which have been identified as needing improvement and choose specific photos as examples for the photographer to see what could have been done differently to improve and achieve a better result. This exercise will show your team that there are only a few variables to keep in mind when taking a quality clinical photo.

If the staff is educated on the core principles of clinical photography, the quality of the pictures they take will greatly improve. Each staff member should be made aware that the pictures taken by each of them will periodically be reviewed; this education becomes more effective and the support staff will understand that he/she is accountable for each photo he/she takes.

CLINICAL PHOTOGRAPHY BASICS



We have discussed some techniques for coaching and training, but what type of improvements can be made? There are several steps which can make it much easier for support staff to take a great clinical photo. There are entire books written on this subject, but when training your team to capture quality photos, I have narrowed the list to the six most important features to remember when taking the photos for your particular practice:

Lighting, Positioning, Shadow, Background, Stability, Consistency.

These are the core principles of proper clinical photography and every photo taken should give consideration to these items. After training your team, you may want to post a note in your exam room with these items highlighted. Each time your staff takes a picture, they should take the photo using these basic principles. This will help them remember the techniques and eventually, it will become second nature to the photographer.

Let us look individually at the six items mentioned above in detail and how they translate to real world clinical photography:



LIGHTING

Naturally, lighting is one of the most important aspects of photography, but commonly, it is misunderstood.

In general, most exam rooms have sufficient lighting for clinical photography. Standard halogen or fluorescent lights typically provide more than enough light as long as the wattage of the bulb is sufficient. Incandescent lights are not optimal for clinical photography; they are not even optimal for any doctor's examination room. If you must use incandescent light, 120W soft white bulbs are a better alternative to standard bulbs and will provide a better spectrum of light for your photographs.

Many photographers feel that they do not have enough light, but the issue is that they are not aware of where the light source is in relation to the subject being photographed. When taking a picture of a patient, the photographer must be sure that the light is shining on the subject being photographed. If your patient is sitting on an exam table, and the room's light source is behind the person taking the photo, then light is being blocked and will not allow for a quality photo to be taken. Before taking a photo, the photographer should make sure there is a direct path between the light source and the subject area.



LIMITED LIGHT



WELL DISTRIBUTED LIGHT

SHADOWING

If you have sufficient light in a room, but are not positioning your subject correctly or the camera is not angled properly to take advantage of the light, you can get a shadow on the photo. At times, shadow may not be noticeable with the naked eye, but will be more pronounced in the actual photograph.



PROFESSIONAL TIP:
Make sure you are not blocking your light source

POSITIONING

Positioning is critical for good clinical photos. Part of the clinical photographer's job is to instruct the patient how to sit and place his body in order to capture the best photo. The highest quality photos I typically see are taken by clinicians who have a pre-defined series of photos that are taken for every patient. Each patient's photos are taken in the same position, often using props such as step stools or tape on the floor to position the feet for each shot. By walking into each photo session with a plan, clinicians are able to streamline the process and take better photos.

Positioning the patient is not, however, the only thing to be mindful of when taking your clinical photos. The photographer must be aware of the camera's positioning. The simplest way to remember this is to keep the camera flat and pointed directly at the subject area. Never hold the camera at an angle when taking a clinical photo, as this can distort your photograph and detract from overall quality.



PROFESSIONAL TIP:
Never hold your camera at an angle

BACKGROUND

One of the biggest areas for improvement I often see is the use of backdrops. I cannot stress how critical it is to have an appropriate backdrop behind your patient whenever possible. Very light-skinned patients should have a contrasting, darker color as a backdrop. This simple tool will afford much better results regarding the quality of the pictures taken of your patients.

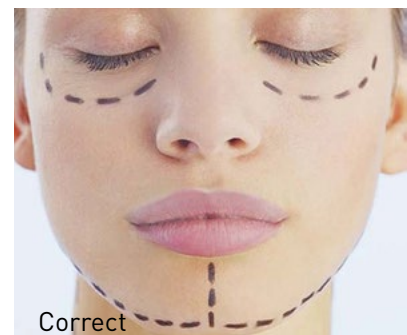
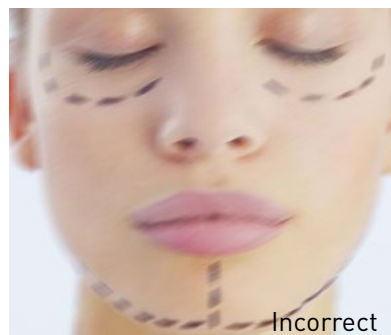
It is simple and affordable to use what is already in the office as backdrop material: blue medical drapes. If these are not available to the staff member taking the photo, buy a few yards of material at any craft/fabric store. Dark or navy blue fabric will provide the best results. You can use a lighter color fabric for a darker skin tone. The fabric can either be hung in the exam room, or you can find a way to make a “prop” background that is versatile but will not get in the way. Some more creative users have used a large section of poster board and affixed the blue material to it with a spray adhesive. This type of prop can be positioned as needed and is portable between exam rooms.



PROFESSIONAL TIP:
Blue surgical drapes are an ideal background for clinical photography

STABILITY

Holding a camera steady is essential when taking a clinical photograph. Surprisingly, this is an area we have to coach on quite often. Whenever possible, use some type of prop to help steady the camera. Exam stools and exam tables work well, but you can use your other hand to stabilize the hand holding the camera. Be creative with your props, but more importantly, be aware of the need for a steady hand when taking your photos.



PROFESSIONAL TIP:
Whenever possible, use some type of prop to help steady the camera

CONSISTENCY

Consistency is critical when taking photos for clinical use. It is important to remember to do a “before and after” photo in the same lighting, backdrop and size. These photos are a key component of marketing and illustrating your services. Any person visiting your website will surely be viewing the work you have done to consider the results they expect from your procedures---good clinical photos will increase the number of people who search your website and seek your services. The photos are more impressive when shot at the same angle, and are taken with the same backdrop and lighting. These photographs are your professional portfolio and also help increase referrals from colleagues for your good work.

Using a standardized process for taking photos is an excellent way to guarantee photo consistency. However, utilizing your previous photo as a guide for your new photo is the best way to insure that you take the same picture every time. There are a number of photography platform which offer a photo “Ghosting” feature that allows the user to overlay a previous photo onto a new photo to be used as a guide for framing the new image. Ghosting insures that no matter who took the previous photo that the current photographer can render a new photo consistent with the old one.



PROFESSIONAL TIP:
Remember to do a “before and after” photo in the same lighting, backdrop and size

PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT

Anyone can pick up a mobile device or a digital camera and take a photo. Even the most advanced technological features available will do little for your practice if the person behind the camera is unskilled or inexperienced. A patient visit in the exam room is the wrong time to be honing your photographic skills. Instead, try to stage the exam room as you would for a visit, and use members of your staff as models in perfecting your procedure. This ensures that you're ready and able to capture a quality photo when the need arises.

Also, don't be afraid to take more than one shot. It's rare for even seasoned professional photographers to take only one shot of a particular image they wish to capture. Taking multiple photos takes only seconds and allows you to choose the best image from the group, and with images stored on digital media, it's easy to delete the ones you don't need to limit storage issues.

Advancing technology has provided the medical community with invaluable tools that allow healthcare providers to better diagnose and treat their patients' conditions and concerns. The advent of clinical photography with telemedicine provides limitless possibilities in provider/patient collaboration. By mastering the aforementioned techniques in your clinical setting, you poise your practice to take its place at the forefront of innovation in the world of patient care.

About AppwoRx

The Appworx platofm has revolutionied the field of clinical photography. Our software transforms your mobile devices into powerful clinical photography tool, enabling you streamline the process of capturing and cataloging patient photos.

Cloud based photo storage means that your staff can access photos from anywhere. With AppwoRx you can easily track and communicate patient treatment and progress, facilitate inter-office referrals, supplement insurance claims, illustrate services and engage patients.

To learn more about AppwoRx, visit us at www.myappworx.com

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