Accurate Patient Registration Helps Drive Speed to Payment
A Focus on Clean Claims

Introduction
Serving northwest Indiana, Community Healthcare System (CHS) is composed of three nonprofit hospitals, the 445-bed Community Hospital in Munster, the 191-bed St. Catherine Hospital in East Chicago and St. Mary Medical Center, a 195-bed facility in Hobart. Together, the hospitals make up the area’s largest integrated healthcare system.

Community’s Patient Financial Services department likes to focus on the positive. And one huge positive for the three-hospital system is the success rate of accurate patient registrations, which can speed the revenue cycle through fewer denials and rejected claims, as well as fewer returned statements.

Accurate billing starts with accurate information, making patient registration vital to the overall success of the claims process. Community Healthcare System was looking for technical help to improve the quality of claims when it installed AhiQa and a new claims system in 2008. Those changes brought the days in accounts receivable down by 25% to 42.9 days in 2010.

“We were looking for a solution to help us have clean claims,” recalls Karen Schneider, Regional Director of Patient Financial Services, who’s been with CHS since 1985. “We knew the registration process was becoming more and more complicated, so we wanted a way to help registration staff upfront and be able to apply our rules.”

Verification on the Front End
AhiQa stood out from competitors because of the product’s flexibility to write edits that went beyond those that came with the product. “We had a lot of claim edits that we used on the back end, but we were able to move them to the front end to prevent them from happening in the first place,” Schneider says.
The staff doesn’t say they like (AhiQa) – they say they love it!

— Karen Schneider, Community Healthcare System
Regional Director of Patient Financial Services

Staff appreciates the functionality of the AhiQa system, which provides immediate feedback but allows 72 hours following registration to fix any error or warning messages, adds Monita Puckett, Revenue Cycle Analyst and AhiQa Administrator. Puckett handles creating or tweaking edits to streamline the registration and verification processes. For those who may fall short, Puckett says the reporting dashboard can show the number of errors or warnings per employee to help focus retraining efforts at the individual level.

So in 2010, when Community chose Epic as the electronic medical record system to replace the disparate electronic medical record (EMR) systems used at its three hospitals, there was no question that AhiQa would continue to be used. Accounts receivable days rose in the year following implementation, but they dropped again and were 46.45 days as of June 30, 2013.

Schneider credits the robust functionality of AhiQa for helping to improve the first-time accuracy of registration information, which averaged more than 99.5% during the last six months of 2013 and was 99.69% in December 2013.

“We do require that all of our registration users maintain 99% accuracy or greater, but most users hit 100%,” Schneider says. “We have consistently had 100% accuracy at St. Catherine Hospital since the very beginning, because of the diligence of the manager, Sandra Hill.”

Vital Complement to Epic EMR

Because the changeover to a new EMR system is a huge undertaking, Puckett says the registration staff at the first hospital that made the switch to Epic in February 2011 did not have access to AhiQa immediately. She quickly learned that the staff felt lost without its functionality to verify patient information, so AhiQa was turned on at the same time the EMR went live at the other two hospitals. In addition to patient registration, CHS uses AhiQa for address and identity verification, which has helped reduce returned mail and the potential to bill the wrong payer.

The phenomenal accuracy rates that registration and financial counselors have achieved can be credited to a solid combination of reasons – the usability of the software, a positive institutional attitude that focuses on accuracy instead of errors and executive buy-in. The importance of registration accuracy comes from management, and AhiQa scores are part of user evaluation and management evaluation. Schneider, the hospital CFOs, billing managers and others often send thank you notes or congratulatory signs to reinforce the importance of registration accuracy.

A Best Practice Committee consisting of managers and supervisors from patient accounting, registration, physician offices and central scheduling meets every six to eight weeks to discuss common tools, including AhiQa. Schneider credits the committee for keeping the focus on the software and for proactively suggesting edits that make users’ jobs easier.