John Muir Health Stays Focused on the Patient Experience While Transforming Revenue Cycle

John Muir Health is an organization undergoing major transformations—opening two new patient care towers in the last two years and now building a state-of-the-art outpatient center, implementing a new information system to assure patients have a single record available in all clinical areas, and launching two accountable care organizations (ACOs). Each of these ambitious initiatives is designed to improve quality and patient safety, increase clinical and operational efficiencies, and most importantly, improve the patient experience. And, each makes it essential that John Muir Health stays focused on managing the revenue cycle.
Organization-at-a-Glance

Organization:
John Muir Health

Location:
Three hospitals and multiple facilities in California throughout Contra Costa County and parts of Alameda and Solano counties

Demographics:
John Muir Health includes three hospitals: John Muir Medical Center, Walnut Creek, a 572-licensed bed medical center that serves as Contra Costa County’s only designated trauma center; John Muir Medical Center, Concord, a 313-licensed bed medical center in Concord; and the John Muir Health Behavioral Health Center, a 73-bed psychiatric hospital located in Concord. John Muir Health also operates two outpatient centers and four urgent care centers, as well as specialty centers that focus on breast health, diabetes care, medical imaging, occupational medicine, pediatrics, physical rehabilitation, women’s health, and wound care. John Muir Health has more than 6,000 total employees.

Website:
www.johnmuirhealth.com

John Muir Health is a not-for-profit integrated system of doctors, hospitals and other services. John Muir Health was formed in 1997 when the Walnut Creek and Concord medical centers merged. Together, they are recognized as preeminent centers for neurosciences, orthopedics, cancer care, cardiovascular care, trauma care, emergency care and high-risk obstetrics. Other areas of specialty include general surgery, robotic surgery, weight-loss surgery, rehabilitation, and critical care. Both hospitals were recently ranked in the top three in the San Francisco/Oakland Area and top 20 in California by U.S. News & World Report. All hospitals are accredited by The Joint Commission, a national surveyor of quality patient care. In addition, John Muir Health provides a number of primary care and outpatient services throughout the community and has urgent care centers in Brentwood, Concord, San Ramon, and Walnut Creek. The organization also includes the John Muir Physician Network, one of the largest medical groups in Northern California, with more than 900 primary care and specialty physicians who belong to either John Muir Medical Group (JMMG) or Muir Medical Group IPA, Inc. The Physician Network owns and operates primary care practices staffed by JMMG physicians in 23 locations throughout Contra Costa and parts of Alameda County. JMMG also provides hospitalists at John Muir Health’s two acute care hospitals.
The organization is taking on this challenge by standardizing and consolidating the multiple revenue cycles across the system’s many components. Although John Muir Health functions as an integrated delivery system, Chris Pass, the Senior Vice President of Revenue Cycle & Analytics, says the organization had not blended the people, processes, and technologies that make up the complex institution. The task of streamlining the revenue cycle across three hospitals, multiple outpatient sites, and physician practice management systems is all the more vital in today’s complicated reimbursement environment, so Pass’ group began the transformation in Fall 2011 by focusing on health information management (HIM) and billing. Pre-services authorization is now in progress. All of this coincides with the system-wide transition to electronic health records (EHRs) that will go live in selected areas in November 2013 and within the three John Muir Health hospitals in Spring 2014.

Assuring that patients have a single record available in all clinical areas is expected to streamline registration, scheduling, and other processes that intersect with the revenue cycle, thus improving the care experience from the patient perspective. Pass expects there will be less duplication in paperwork and that the efficiency and quality of patient hand-offs will improve. A revenue cycle team of approximately 30 employees is responsible for designing, building, and testing the enhancements. Then, John Muir Health staff in various departments will receive training on the new system and Pass’ group will track and trend results before final implementation.

With so many initiatives underway, John Muir Health relies on outsourcing certain functions including collections, statement printing and mailing to optimize its revenue cycle processes. Cymetrix is part of that equation by working to collect small balances.
“Outsourcing is important because it lets us use our revenue cycle team on more complex work,” says Pass. “Cymetrix allows us to leverage their cost structure and use our folks to cater to the personal experience patients deserve.”

Although vendors have the potential to provide revenue cycle solutions necessary to fulfill John Muir Health’s mission of improving the health of the communities it serves with quality and compassion, the organization has been careful in its contracting. This caution goes beyond seeking vendors who are reputable and have a proven track.

“We decided to spread work to multiple (revenue cycle) companies to see who is really executing, who is fitting in, who gets it, who is the best fit longer term,” Pass explains. “We want to understand who’s easy to work with and who needs the most hand holding.”

Pass, who puts Cymetrix in the results-oriented, easy-to-work-with category, thinks it’s important for health care organizations to be proactive in communicating with vendors about needs and expectations. A clear vision, defined scope, and deadlines are necessary in order to produce measurable and sustainable improvements in the revenue cycle.

“You have to look at outsourcing as a partnership, not as ‘I don’t have to worry about this anymore,’” he says. “You have to manage the relationship to get the value you want out of it. The bottom line is delivering results.”