

Hospital Finds Success With HRS

Complex coding requirements in a tough-to-recruit region called for a proven, professional solution.

AN INNOVATIVE, REGIONAL health care provider for the 100,000+ population of San Joaquin Valley, CA, Delano Regional Medical Center is the only hospital within a 30-mile radius. Due to the agricultural nature of the region, Delano cares for many uninsured and underinsured patients—and the medical center is committed to providing top quality care to every member of its community. The facility has 156 beds, 565 employees and 112 medical staff members.

OUR CHALLENGE

Complex coding requirements in a tough-to-recruit region called for a proven, professional solution. Like many hospitals serving rural areas, Delano constantly struggled to find and retain reliable, expert coders who could manage a fluctuating, often high volume. Its patient mix historically included a high percentage of Medicare and Medi-Cal payers, which added even more stringent coding requirements.

Delano tried various solutions such as training staff in-house, recruiting coders in the local area and utilizing freelance coders. These potential solutions quickly revealed their flaws: costly advertising and recruiting efforts did not yield results, and the trend toward coders working at home further restricted the hospital's ability to find coders.

The hospital contracted with a Los Angeles-based freelance coder for a while; however, this situation also had serious drawbacks. The coder incurred high travel expenses, and because he was a "solo" coder working for multiple facilities, he could not provide a strong system of accountability, review and communication.

The hospital's IT and financial leadership quickly realized that Delano needed a better solution. The discharged-not-final-billed (DNFB) time was increasing, leading to an increase in outstanding accounts receivable days. As a result, accurate reporting and forecasting was virtually impossible to do.

I told my boss we needed help. I was always behind; the finance department was breathing down my back. We needed people who knew what they were doing.

OUR SOLUTION

When the Delano team began seeking alternative solutions, they evaluated multiple coding services vendors and quotes. Delano needed the dedication and commitment an on-site coding team would offer; however, they also sought a level of experience diffi-

cult to find in either individual coders or coding companies. One company stood out from the rest—Health Record Services (HRS). The HRS team includes only credentialed, U.S.-based coders with a minimum of 5 years experience.

HRS staff acts like they are our employees, sitting in our office. Each day, the HIM department receives a list of what was coded by HRS, and they are right on target and don't miss a thing.

Initially, the hospital scanned paper records and uploaded to the HRS remote coding solution. After reviewing those images, HRS coded and abstracted directly into the hospital's encoder and abstracting system. Recently, Delano installed a new hospital-wide information system that HRS accesses through a VPN to perform the coding. HRS has used the same system for many other clients, making the transition seamless and efficient without any coding backlog.

Sandra Bakich, MBA, director of information management, stated, "HRS considerably lowered our coding turnaround times and accounts receivable. We are so pleased with HRS' services and high level of professionalism."

OUR RESULT

We've seen greater accuracy, a reduced revenue cycle and a seamless relationship with the industry's most experienced coders.

HRS is not only meeting their contract, they are exceeding it. Through HRS' consistent and high quality coding, Delano's HIM and finance departments have increased their productivity as well as the bottom line, enabling significant benefits, such as:

- reduced coding turnaround and accounts receivables;
- improved coding accuracy;
- customized coding program;
- instant issue resolution; and
- better communication.

The HRS team acts like Delano employees, without the issues or costs associated with employees. It's a seamless, well-coordinated solution—and it works great for our hospital. ■

Sally Ann Schiavon is unit coordinator, medical records, at Delano (CA) Regional Medical Center.

