

Credentialing Software: the Ayes Have It!

Pennsylvania eye clinic uses credentialing software to improve accounts receivable.

By Kathleen Waton, Associate Editor

Pat Smith gets more shuteye now that she's traded 3" X 5" tickler cards for customized and automatic electronic alerts in Sy.Med's OneApp credentialing solution. As director of patient accounts at the Pennsylvania College of Optometry's (PCO) Eye Institute, Smith is in charge of billing and collections. She also shares responsibility with a colleague for credentialing the clinic's 106 physicians with 16 insurance carriers.



The Eye Institute, located in Philadelphia three miles away from the college, is its primary clinical teaching and patient care facility. With 140 employees, the Institute offers everything from specialty services, like laser procedures, to routine eye exams. Smith and Margaret Wilder, administrative assistant to the vice president of The Eye Institute, credential the five ophthalmologists and 101 optometrists who see 30,000 to 40,000 patients a year at the clinic. Sixty percent of the doctors graduated from PCO, and all of the doctors also teach at the college.

Applications Like Books

In 1990, the clinic organized the 3" x 5" cards according to insurance carrier to remind staff when they needed to recredential the physicians. "We only had about 10 doctors," Smith says "Then, all we did was fill in their demographics on the provider form, photocopy their medical license and mail the two pieces off to the insurance carrier. Now, applications can be 15 pages long and require everything from demographic information to Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) certificates and from malpractice insurance confirmation to languages spoken—you name it, they need it. The applications have become like books. As the number of doctors and the size of the applications grew, we couldn't keep up. I used to wake up at night and think 'did I check the tickler files?'"

Feeling overwhelmed, Smith and Wilder needed an efficient process to manage provider information and automate the credentialing process. Initially they heard about systems that did all the credentialing for an organization like The Eye Institute. "But we didn't like the idea of sending private information to an outside company," Smith says. So they went online, typed "credentialing" into a search engine and obtained several vendor names. They reviewed proposals from the two comparable vendors and participated in online demonstrations. Both vendors could accomplish similar tasks and provided excellent references. Smith says the process of selecting a credentialing software vendor took a long time—five or six months. Sy.Med Development Inc.'s OneApp software received the most "ayes" for ease of installation and use, immediate return on investment and impact on Smith's billing and collections. "We wanted the best bang for our buck," Smith says.

Smith admits they are "not techy people," so they needed an easy-to-use credentialing solution and Sy.Med's OneApp fit the bill.

Sy.Med's software can be easily installed by downloading it from their Web site. In fact, they have had clients download software, receive training and begin using the software all in the same day. However, Smith and Wilder opted to have a company representative install the software on site. Prior to installation, Smith and Wilder sent existing data in Excel spreadsheets for Sy.Med to convert to the MS SQL server database used for *OneApp*.

A company representative spent two days training Smith and Wilder how to use the program, including how to scan and store images, enter data and how to create and access the electronic credentialing applications and forms that complement the program. Lance Hebert, vice president of client services at Sy.Med, describes *OneApp* like "an oversized mail merge" that allows users to drag and drop their data fields onto any electronic applications and forms.

One Click

Today, when it's time to recredential a provider, an electronic reminder alerts Smith and Wilder well in advance of expirations and deadlines. After Wilder scans new data, Smith selects the provider name, the application to be completed and the word "credential." With one mouse click, the provider's data populates the form. Smith then sends the laser-printed paper application to the physician to sign and return to Smith or mail directly to the payer for verification and acceptance.

Before they went live with Sy.Med's credentialing software in March 2004, Smith and Wilder spent an average of 18 hours a week credentialing their physicians. They had to pore through numerous file cabinets, dig through stacks of paper for CVs, certificates and other key documents, recall detailed information, seek reference sources, hand write the lengthy applications for each provider, photocopy the numerous attachments and refile all the information in the rows of file cabinets.

Today, it takes only an average of six hours a week to credential the growing roster of doctors, and Smith and Wilder are not yet using all of the system's features and functions. They use the program to maintain provider information, including CVs, DEA certificates, work history, education, evidence of malpractice insurance and articles published by the physicians. *OneApp* also allows them to maintain personal files for the physicians, including photographs. Smith and Wilder plan to utilize their new software to maintain checklists, related physicians, military history, claims, call logs, references and tracking—all tabs within the program. Because of the customized electronic alerts, Smith and Wilder are able to effectively manage their recredentialing tasks, avoid crisis mode and shorten the timeline for physician credentialing, which boosts The Eye Institute's receivables.

Physicians who join The Institute in July, for instance, can be credentialed by September. Previously, it took some payers in Pennsylvania as long as six months to credential physicians. Today, Smith and Wilder have a very efficient process for credentialing. Every June when the students graduate, they take advantage of the new physicians' proximity and credential 12 to 13 doctors at a time—then set alerts to stay on top of their recredentialing two years down the road.

The faster providers are accurately enrolled with payers, the faster funds are brought into the clinic. "We don't get paid if a doctor is not credentialed," Smith says, and if deadlines are missed, some payers reduce or eliminate reimbursement. Thanks to their new credentialing software, The Eye Institute is credentialing its physicians in an accurate and timely manner, bringing funds into the clinic more quickly. And Smith is sleeping better at night.