

Agility EHR Helps Reliant Improve Coding and Triple Patient Volume, All While Decreasing Staff

Urgent Care and Occupational Medicine specialty practices have unique data and clinical documentation needs that require fast, templated charting. No one knows this more than Los Angeles-based Reliant Immediate Medical Care Group, Inc.

In 2006, Reliant implemented a practice management and EMR system that it expected to help streamline operations during their transition from paper-based processes. Instead, problems got worse and the practice became less efficient. "The first system wasn't user friendly. Back then, we dictated notes, and they didn't make it into the system. The documentation simply wasn't there when we needed it. Our coding was getting downgraded, and the whole system was costing us time and money. We tried to adapt to it for about six months, then we simply decided that we needed to replace it," explained Gene Howell, Executive Director of Reliant.

The process of finding a new system started with an internet search for occupational medicine and urgent care software. Net Health was quickly found, and Reliant began evaluating the Agility software, an integrated EHR and practice management solution from Net Health.

"Maybe we could have gotten by on our old software, but Agility offered us new capabilities. We were confident that the documentation capabilities within Agility would support us in the event of an audit," Howell said.

Agility's Employer Portal was another important capability that Reliant wanted. The portal enables employers to securely view HIPAA-compliant information about employee visits, especially workers' compensation claims – without having to call the clinic. Reliant evaluated other solutions, but found that they would all need modifications by their vendors to match the capabilities already available with Agility. Ultimately, Reliant purchased Agility and went live in October 2008.

Agility is a CCHIT Certified® 2011 Ambulatory EHR, (the Certification Commission for Healthcare Information Technology), and is available as a hosted or installed solution. The product is designed to support the high patient volumes that are typical of urgent care practices. Agility's exclusive functions chart simple complaints with just a few mouse clicks, yet the product still provides the robust charting needed to document more complex patient conditions.

Tripled Patient Volume While Reducing Staff By 7 (15%)

The increased efficiency of Reliant's documentation, coding, billing and collection processes has enabled the practice to reduce its staff by 15%. Simultaneously, the practice has increased its patient volume from 1,000 to 3,400 patients per month. Reliant previously employed three full-time coders and now employs one. Other reductions took place in the collections and front-office staff who were not replaced when they left. "Agility allowed us to increase our patient volume and reduce staff. Our front-office processes are smoother, and now our billing staff is focused on collections instead of just trying to get the bills out the door," Howell said.



Challenge

Struggling with the lack of coding support and user-interface problems of an inefficient practice management system and poorly designed EMR, Reliant Immediate Care Medical Group, Inc. looked for a state-of-the-art integrated system as a replacement.

Solution

The Agility software was selected because it was specifically designed to accommodate Reliant's combination urgent care and occupational medicine practice, and it provided the coding support and efficiencies needed in their fast-growing practice.

Results

Agility's automated coding and efficiency allowed Reliant to triple its patient volume while reducing its staff by 15%. It also enabled electronically submitted workers' compensation claims to be reimbursed within a few days of billing. Reliant's enhanced clinical documentation supported higher coding levels and reduced payer inquiries. And the Agility Employer Portal dramatically reduced employer telephone calls to the clinic.

AUTOMATED CODING ELIMINATED CODING ERRORS

Reliant extensively uses Agility's automated coding capabilities. "The more choices you take out of users' hands, the fewer errors you have. Providers chart with on-screen templates, and Agility automatically creates the coding, even for workers' compensation claims. It does it all behind the screens and lets providers do what they need to do, which is see patients. It takes providers out of the business of billing. The last thing you want is a staff of 40 people deciding what to charge," Howell said.

IMPROVED CLINICAL DOCUMENTATION REDUCED PAYER INQUIRIES

Reliant is experiencing improvements in its clinical documentation that support higher-level coding. It has also reduced inquiries from payers. "For example, we've worked with an IPA for years that routinely wanted to review our documentation to see if it supported our billing. Since switching to Agility, they've seen our documentation improve, and now their inquiries have decreased dramatically," Howell said.

SELF-RELIANCE ENABLED OPTIMIZED CHARTING

"We needed to make modifications to customize our charting templates. After our training sessions with Net Health, I could do the work myself, instead of having them do it. During the day, the providers kept track of the changes they wanted, and then we worked together in the evenings. The template changes would go live the next day. I'm able to make 95% of the system tweaks myself while keeping the system live," Howell said. "When new employees join us, it's really easy to get them started on the system in a half day or less," Howell added.

WORKER'S COMPENSATION REIMBURSED WITHIN A FEW DAYS

Documentation and billing improvements are expediting the reimbursement process. Reliant now receives its workers' compensation reimbursements from those payers who accept electronically within days of billing. "With Agility, you are better able to control your money. When I see a heavy payroll coming up, I make sure that I get those workers' compensation billings out first, because I know that we'll receive our reimbursement within a few days. It's rare that you're able to control your cash flow that closely," Howell said.

Reimbursement for non-workers' compensation billings is improved as well. "We use Agility to run reports about our accounts receivable aging. We receive 50% of our reimbursements within 30 days, and an additional 30% within 60 days," Howell said.

EMPLOYER PORTAL DRAMATICALLY REDUCED EMPLOYER INQUIRIES

Mr. Howell praises Agility's Employer Portal, which is delivering significant benefits to the practice. "Employees that visit for work injury evaluation and treatment or employment-related physicals are checked-in and checked-out upon their arrival and departure. Employers use the portal to view check-in and out times, to verify that employees have returned to work quickly after a visit to Reliant," Howell said. The portal also allows them to view any work restrictions and referrals related to workers' compensation cases. The portal drastically reduced employer calls to the clinic and has proven to be a value-added service that attracts employers to us."

LOOKING AHEAD

Reliant's increased efficiency has encouraged the practice to plan one and, possibly two, additional locations within the coming year. Additionally, Reliant is using the robust reporting capabilities within Agility to help it earn certification as a Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC). FQHC certification will enable it to apply for grants as it expands its care delivery model. "The whole philosophy and mindset of the industry is changing with healthcare reform, and the days of non-insured individuals going to the ER for care will change. We're moving quickly to get our FQHC certification, and Agility is helping us do this," Howell said. "Reliant also plans to apply for ARRA funding. Agility is a CCHIT certified product, and when Net Health promised us Agility would also meet the Meaningful Use requirements once they were finalized, they kept that promise. They've never let us down with anything."

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