



CINCINNATI CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL MEDICAL CENTER

CHART LINKS BOOSTS PRODUCTIVITY



Being one of the nation's largest pediatric speech pathology practices, Cincinnati Children's Division of Speech Pathology had some unique needs that couldn't be addressed by simply adapting a generic clinical documentation or electronic medical records system. For example, the pediatric speech pathology practice at Cincinnati Children's now supports care delivery at 11 locations (with a 12th coming next year) and employs more than 100 clinicians.

The early benefits realized within a year of deploying the solution confirmed Cincinnati Children's decision to build a custom solution vs. adapting a generic solution, and the solution continues to deliver a financial return to the organization each year. To illustrate this, in 2004 Cincinnati Children's Division of Speech Pathology produced the equivalent of about 25,000 pages of documentation. If this documentation was produced using traditional paper-based methods, instead of electronic documentation, the Division would have incurred close to \$200,000 in transcription and support costs alone. Yet, with using the Chart Links electronic documentation system, transcription costs are completely eliminated because clinicians enter their documentation directly into the system.

The commercial viability of the software application was validated with the winning of the 1995 International Beacon Award through IBM/Lotus. In addition, the solution was eventually purchased by Chart Links, which now sells, supports and continues to develop the system. Cincinnati Children's continues to provide feedback to Chart Links for system improvements, and new Chart Links modules are often tested at Cincinnati Children's.

CHALLENGE

More than a decade ago, the Division of Speech Pathology at Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center (CCHMC) embarked upon a mission to leverage information technology to reduce its documentation and administrative demands. The organization quickly discovered that speech pathology-specific software didn't exist back in the mid 1990s.

SOLUTION

Cincinnati Children's Division of Speech Pathology decided to develop its own solution, which later evolved into today's Chart Links document management and electronic charting system.

RESULTS

Within a year of deploying the solution, the speech pathology division increased billed time 1 to 2 hours per week per full-time equivalent (FTE), increased reimbursement, decreased support staff costs, and improved net revenues.

“The business of speech pathology requires many tasks in order to receive reimbursement, such as obtaining insurance authorizations, generating charge tickets, coding correctly, and documenting care. With manual systems, these tasks are difficult to track and are prone to errors,” said Ann W. Kummer, Ph.D, CCC-SLP, ASHA-F, the senior director of the Division of Speech Pathology at Cincinnati Children’s. “Chart Links handles these tasks for us, such as automatically tracking authorizations. Now, every time a patient encounter is billed, the system has a pop-up window that displays how many more visits are authorized, the expiration date, and when reauthorization is necessary. As a result of this feature, patients are never seen mistakenly without authorization or a payment agreement.”



WORKFLOW ENHANCEMENTS

Chart Links reduces redundant data entry by automatically flowing patient and insurance information into other forms within the system after the data is initially entered. Prompts from within the system automatically walk clinicians and administrative staff members through processes. For example, upon patient check-in, a charge ticket is automatically generated. If the charge is for a first treatment session, the system will create a template for a new treatment plan. If the charge is for an evaluation, an evaluation report reminder is created. Evaluation templates can be chosen, or free text can be copied and pasted into the template.

Drop-down menus allow for the quick creation of treatment plans with point-and-click simplicity. Goals are selected from a standard database, yet can be modified. Group therapy treatment plans are created based on a single treatment plan that is applied (and modified if necessary) to all patients in the group. As goals are accomplished, the date appears in the goals table. When a progress or discharge report is needed, all that information is already in the report. The clinician just needs to add the recommendations (usually by selecting key sentences) and then the report can be electronically signed and faxed online. Automated documentation saves a tremendous amount of time and allows Cincinnati Children’s to get reports to its customers (physicians, parents, and insurance companies) quickly.

EASILY TRACK COMPLIANCE, PRODUCTIVITY AND REVENUE

Chart Links allows managers to track the completion of charges and reports so that they are done in a timely manner. Additional reports can track productivity by comparing billed time over the employee’s scheduled work time. Revenue can be monitored in real time, or by date, month, location or individual clinician.

“One unexpected benefit of the system is its impact on our staff. Students rotating through our program are disappointed when they have to leave to work for an employer that does not have this type of profession-driven documentation and workflow system,” Kummer said. “On more than one occasion, staff members who have left our organization – due to a spouse getting relocated for a job, etc. – have moved back to the area to return to their position, partly because they wanted to return to an electronic environment.”

Using Chart Links has enabled Cincinnati Children’s Division of Speech Pathology to improve the quality and timeliness of its documentation, increase reimbursement, decrease costs, increase staff satisfaction, and manage all of its support activities (referrals, scheduling, insurance authorizations, etc.) for all locations from a centralized office.

“With Chart Links, we have been able to manage phenomenal growth – growing from four to 11 sites and seeing our clinical staff grow from about 30 to more than 100 clinicians during the past 10-plus years,” Kummer said. “Our electronic workflow system allows us to provide better service, while serving many more patients than would be possible without it!”