



CHART LINKS IMPROVES CLINICAL DOCUMENTATION AND BILLING



Based in Columbus, Ohio, the Columbus Speech & Hearing Center is a non-profit, United Way Agency. Each year, the Center serves nearly 10,000 people across Ohio. Center services include: audiology and hearing aid services; speech-language and occupational therapy; as well as the Comprehensive Program for the Deaf, a job placement program for adults who are hard-of-hearing or deaf. The Center collaborates with numerous other agencies and community organizations in a full-time program of education, testing, evaluation, therapy and vocational counseling at the Center, throughout Central Ohio, and across the state.

Prior to using Chart Links, the Center was using a generic physician practice charting solution that was without rehabilitation-specific functionality. For instance, the solution could not accommodate reoccurring appointments, which are quite common in rehabilitation settings. Because the charting solution lacked this and other functionality, upgrading the system to become Y2K compliant was not a practical option.

"While we were evaluating systems, I had the chance to view Chart Links at the rehabilitation department at Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center," said Karen Deeter, Director of Operations at the Center. "As soon as I saw the functionality of the software, I knew that I had to have it. There were so many features within the system that would help us with our workflow."

CHALLENGE

Facing concerns about the Y2K compliance of its previous system, and wanting a new system with additional functionality specific to its line of business, the Columbus Speech & Hearing Center began searching for a new medical rehabilitation software system.

SOLUTION

After viewing the solution at the rehabilitation clinic of a nearby hospital, the Center selected the Chart Links medical rehabilitation solution from Chart Links. The solution also includes interfaces to the Lytec Medical Billing Software that the Center uses within its clinics.

RESULTS

Since using Chart Links, the Center has virtually eliminated redundant data entry, reduced clinical documentation turnaround time from two to three weeks down to a few days, and greatly decreased billing and administrative tasks.

Chart Links software is designed to provide outpatient medical rehabilitation facilities the ability to streamline all of the daily tasks associated with a patient's audiology, occupational therapy, physical therapy, or speech language pathology visit. Whether it is scheduling a patient's appointment, managing a patient's chart, processing charges, creating treatment documentation or retrieving past records, Chart Links makes it easier to put patient care first. Chart Links supports both large multi-facility rehabilitation hospitals and small stand-alone clinics with workflow software proven to increase productivity.

"One of the things that I like most about the Chart Links system is that once you input the patient's name and birth date, it populates everywhere and clinicians are not having to write it on every form," Deeter said. "In the past, we'd have 10 different forms and each had a different spelling of the patient's name. Chart Links put a stop to that problem."

Another Chart Links feature that greatly benefits the Center is the system's ability to automatically generate charge slips upon client (patient) check-in. Previously, charge slips were assigned manually for appointments and the billing office spent a substantial amount of time locating missing charge slips or tracking down clinicians to finish incomplete charge slips. "When I saw that Chart Links automatically generates charge slips, I knew that we absolutely needed to purchase the system," Deeter said.

Completing and filing clinical documentation posed additional challenges for the Center before it began using Chart Links. For proper billing, every patient encounter needs to be documented with a progress note. However, progress notes often got lost, were illegible or didn't get completed in a timely fashion. With Chart Links, clinicians are able to easily complete the progress notes within the system, and business managers can use the system to monitor the status of progress notes before backlogs get out of control.

Similarly, evaluation and treatment documents used to be handwritten by clinicians and sent to word processors to type. The manual process used to take two to three weeks to complete and included typing the notes, clarifying illegible or unclear notes, as well incorporating one to two revisions before the document was finalized. Now, clinicians can enter their evaluation and treatment notes directly into the system, and – once again – business managers can track the status of the process along the way. "Now it's very easy for the department director to go into the system and see who hasn't done their evaluation reports or their treatment reports, which helps us avoid major backlogs and helps to ensure we remain compliant with our accreditation and quality standards" Deeter said.

The increased productivity and efficiency facilitated by Chart Links has enabled the organization to add clinicians, while decreasing the size of its clerical staff. Before Chart Links, the Center had 9.15 clerical full-time equivalents (FTEs) supporting 27.36 clinician FTEs. After Chart Links, the Center now has 8.95 clerical FTEs supporting 36 clinical FTEs. From a staffing ratio perspective, the increased efficiency is now allowing the Center to maintain only .248 clerical FTEs per clinician, vs. the .334 clerical FTEs per clinician that it used to maintain before implementing Chart Links.

Additionally, the Center is using Chart Links as its primary data entry tool to capture information for billing. An interface between Chart Links and the Center's Lytec Medical Billing solution allows for a seamless exchange of information between the systems. Once patient information is entered into Chart Links, that data is used to generate billings.

The Center is realizing the benefits of moving away from paper-based processes. "Chart Links is helping us transition toward the use of electronic documentation throughout our practice, and has substantially reduced the hassles of tracking and filing paper-based documents," said Dawn Gleason, President & CEO of the Center. "We are now entering electronic audiology files into the system, and we're able to scan in the historical patient records for the patients who we see on an ongoing basis. Overall, Chart Links has helped us improve our workflow and reduce administrative tasks."