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Integration and automation are welcome changes for CHI Health at Home

The Problem:

Several years ago CHI Health at Home was dealing with a major issue. The agency needed a way to better manage documents, a way to automate and streamline what were then completely manual processes to help patients and speed care. More recently, the company was looking to reduce duplication of work efforts and improve employee productivity by overhauling its intake process.

CHALLENGES

Employee productivity

Manual processes

Duplication of work effort

homecare homebase ℠ **+** **forcura**

The Solution:

In February 2016 the agency implemented the Forcura Document Tracking solution in conjunction with Homecare Homebase, a cloud-based EHR software platform for home health and hospice organizations. In 2018, CHI Health at Home added Forcura's Intake and Referral Management module to its suite of productivity tools.

The Results:

The organization now has complete transparency into all operations that relate to document signature. In addition, since everything is digital, employees don't have to wade through paper documents to find something specific, improving cash flow and reducing the amount of unsigned orders that are over 30 days old. On the intake side, managing referrals is streamlined both from a process and manpower perspective. Looking forward, once patient medical record paper files have passed their regulatory storage requirements, physical archive and storage costs will drop precipitously.

ORDERS PROCESSED JULY 2016 – JANUARY 2017

133,000
485s

285,000
Physician Orders

50%
of orders processed in
less than 10 days

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CHI Health at Home, which is the managing entity for home-based services for Catholic Health Initiatives, provides home health, hospice, home infusion, and durable medical equipment services. The agency also offers patient transport services in Cincinnati and Columbus, Ohio.

Until two years ago, caring for its tens of thousands of patients required CHI Health at Home to print out and store paper. Lots of paper. Every time the agency – which operates in 28 markets located in eight states – brought on and cared for a patient, orders were created. Those orders had to be signed by physicians. Managing the paperwork generated was a definite problem, says Jackie Dukes, the agency's Vice President of Innovation and Efficiency.

"When I think about what an office used to look like back then all I can remember is that we were buried in mountains of paper. The accordion files and the stacks of orders on desks waiting to get faxed out or, if they just came back in, waiting to be sorted through...it was overwhelming," explains Dukes.

"It was very manual. Here's my stack of filing. I have to pull the chart, I have to punch holes in my orders. I have to stick them into that chart, put it back, and then I have to store it for 10 years," says Dukes.

All that paper took up space – every patient had a paper medical record that had to be stored in the office for six months before they were farmed out to an outside storage location. Dukes and her team knew technology could solve their dilemma. After careful research, they made the decision to switch from their current software to Homecare Homebase (HCHB). The cloud-based EHR for hospice and homecare agencies allows the company to share and access patient electronic medical record data as well as document and bill for all patient care. Around the same time, they started looking for software that could help streamline the labor-intensive, paper-based document management process.

Forcura, which is a cloud-based document workflow application, stood out from the rest, says Dukes because it was a complementary offering that could be easily integrated with HCHB.

The company started its project by creating a steering committee made up of affected associates, a multidisciplinary senior leadership team, and corporate office staffers. Together, they created a two-office pilot program, installing the HCHB software in their Cincinnati Ohio and London Kentucky agencies. Soon after, Forcura's Document Tracking application was integrated so employees could track documents as they were sent and returned, and then seamlessly attach them to a patient's record in HCHB. The results were impressive. Using the software, users could create a searchable medical record that was HIPAA-compliant, easily notated and tracked within HCHB.

Within six months, the pilot was rolled out to the rest of the company's offices. Today, CHI Health at Home always knows exactly what stage an order is at so patients get care more quickly and, once care is provided, payment happens faster. While CHI had little visibility to orders outstanding prior to implementing Forcura it can now proudly say that nearly 50% of outstanding orders are less than 10 days old. Most important: Everything is digital. There is nothing to print or file anymore.

"Homecare Homebase and Forcura together allow us to have much better visibility to see documents from the initial referral all the way through to a claim going out and processing payment, so we can close out that episode. They help our efficiency tremendously," explains Dukes.

"To always have one place to go to and work from is just easier all around, and I never have to print anything anymore unless I want to. The company went from printing out thousands of pieces of paper a day because that was the only way to get orders out to printing nothing or very little at all."

As an offshoot of this digital focus, CHI Health at Home isn't storing as much paper in its offices or in its archive locations anymore. For example, before implementing Forcura and HCHB, the company spent tens of thousands yearly on offsite document storage. Today, two years into the program, it spends about $4,500 each month. This number will continue to dwindle even more as documents in storage start hitting the regulatory disposal date and can be safely destroyed and disposed of. "I won't say that cost would totally disappear, but 10 years from now it should be minimal," explains Dukes.

Taking it All In

Once CHI Health at Home's document management process was solved, the company turned its focus to improving other processes. Its patient intake process was laborious and often duplicative, wasting time and effort, says Dukes. Employees were printing intake forms and then turning around and uploading them into the system.

One of the main criteria Dukes was looking for in a technology fix was agility. She wanted a solution that would cut the number of steps required to complete the intake process, she says, and make it paperless, too. "When I was looking I asked, 'Is there a solution that I can implement that would combine steps in a process or combine functions in some way that I can make that process more streamlined, simpler, with fewer steps, fewer hand-offs, fewer people involved to move that process forward?'"

The agency was already familiar with Forcura but it was these exact features and capabilities – being able to pull intake paperwork from different sources electronically and store it in a central repository – that sold them on the Forcura Intake & Referral Management module.

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"*Now, because the intake forms aren't on paper anymore, I can log in from Cincinnati, Ohio, and do intake for any of our offices anywhere in the country because I can get to the information. Nothing is sitting on a piece of paper on a fax machine where I can't see it,*" explains Dukes.

Revenue Cycle processes have also been streamlined using HCHB and Forcura's applications – Dukes and her team can see exactly where a patient order is, what needs to happen to it, and how long it's been in the system. "It doesn't take a medical records person two hours to sort through their accordion file to tell me how many orders they have, how many times they've been sent to a physician, or how old they are. I can get that information instantaneously since that data is at my fingertips with Forcura," says Dukes. "It allows me to see very clearly on the dashboard where we stand at any given point in time. I don't have to go pull a report," Dukes says.

In addition, automation frees up employees to concentrate on other tasks and focus more on patient care. Before implementing HCHB and Forcura, CHI Health at Home had lots of duplication in its systems -- repeat jobs in every location such as medical record experts, payroll, and human resources. Employees can now be reassigned to different tasks. "Now our employees can work at the top of their license or skill set."

Going forward, CHI Health at Home will continue to use HCHB and the Forcura applications, monitoring metrics weekly and trying to improve patient and employee satisfaction, as well as financial performance. Explains Dukes: "Forcura gives us transparency into our operations around managing referrals and documents requiring signature, which is awesome. Because we used to say, 'Well, we think this is where we are,' and it would take a massive effort to figure it all out. Now, there's no massive effort, it's right at our fingertips; the data doesn't lie."