

Improving Efficiencies through Technology

By Mark F. Schwall, PT

As I look back at all of the decisions—good, bad, and indifferent—that we have made since opening our practice in 2003, perhaps the single best decision was using an integrated scheduling, documentation, and billing solution such as Clinicient.

When my partner, Elisheva Chamblin, PT, and I set out to establish our private practice, one of the primary objectives in our business plan was to start with an electronic documentation and billing system. The following were motivating factors in this decision:

1. Recognition that this was going to be a requirement by insurers, including Medicare, in the future
2. Our desire to find a technological solution that would improve efficiencies in our offices for clinicians and support staff
3. Improved compliance with documentation, which would mean less money left on the table that could be lost in an audit
4. Improved billing standards for insurers

In the process of our due diligence we examined a variety of packages. We ran across an intriguing integrated scheduling, documentation, and billing package called Clinicient. This package offered the features we were seeking, and we promptly scheduled an online demonstration. By the conclusion of the demonstration done by Jerry Henderson, PT, chief physical therapist for Clinicient and an architect of the documentation portion of the software, we were duly impressed. We were struck by the intuitiveness and flexibility of the highly customizable documentation portion of the software as well as the accessibility of the billing component and all of its associated reporting. We felt that the wide variety of reports would give us the internal controls needed to manage our accounts receivables as well as keep tabs on the timeliness of claims filing and payment.

Clinicient uses an application service provider (ASP) model whereby the software and data are delivered over the Internet. As an ASP, Clinicient is able to provide services that are not

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Date: April 27–28, 2007 [April 27: Noon – 5:30 p.m.; April 28: 8:30 a.m. – 3:45 p.m.]

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possible by using typical "in-house" software. Updates to software are seamless, with no need for changes to software configuration on the clinic computer systems or servers. The need for what could be expensive technical support is practically eliminated. The ASP model eliminates the need for data backups and the possibly disastrous consequences of keeping the software and, more important, the data in-house (think Hurricane Katrina), since Clinicient keeps all data on secure commercial redundant servers as well as on off-site redundant backups. These procedures render your data essentially disaster-proof. The ASP model also provides 24/7 access from any computer with a broadband Internet connection, which means that as managers, we are able to know what is going on in the clinic in real time no matter where we may be.

Implementation of Clinicient for our practice was a turnkey process. With some minor modifications to the stock documentation templates, installation of a wireless network in the clinic, and a rolling bedside table, we were ready to roll (no pun intended!). We found that documenting at the time of evaluation and treatment was easy and timesaving. As soon as the evaluation and/or treatment had been completed, the associated documentation and billing were simultaneously completed and ready for the claim to be filed.

In discussions with my colleagues, in light of our inherent need for control as entrepreneurs, there is always concern about billing services not being performed on-site. In my experience, the advantages of the off-site billing services have far outweighed the misperception that on-site equals control. Using Clinicient, I have unencumbered access to all billing records and reports 24/7. If I have questions about billing or specific accounts, I am able to contact Clinicient by phone or email no differently than if they were in an adjacent office. This model of integrated scheduling, documentation, and billing ensures that my back office is scalable. My back office staffing needs are fixed, as the demands on billing wax and wane with the economy and season. We've eliminated additional human resource management demands on my partner and me as managers as well as all of the associated costs to the practice.

The system has provided us with scalability and flexibility for operational efficiencies and peace of mind, knowing that we've done all we can to ensure compliance with accepted documentation and billing standards. ■

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