

Outpatient Group Solves ROI Challenge

The shared services model relieved in-house headaches and outsourced uncertainty for release of information processing.

By Carolyn Vack, RN

Even as a mid-sized, specialty practice with one location, the several dozen release of information (ROI) requests that Orthopedic Associates of Lancaster received each week were demanding too much time for us to handle promptly.

Our practice has 10 orthopedic surgeons and five physician assistants who typically see about 200 patients per day. As is likely the case at most medical practices, many of us hold multiple responsibilities. It was in my role as the supervisor of medical records that I truly felt the ROI problem.

ROI Headaches

After several years of trying to get the job done in-house, we realized we had to do something about ROI requests. In our case, as an orthopedic practice, they were primarily related to subpoenas, disability or worker's compensation. Despite our best efforts, the ROI requests were piling up because we had no dedicated medical records manager on staff.

Looking at "the pile," we knew that many of the requests had passed their 30-day deadline. Although there can be legal consequences for failing to promptly respond to some types of requests, our motivator was even more basic. We felt that fixing the ROI process was just a part of our larger mission to serve our patients well. It's simply not good practice to neglect ROI requests.

Orthopedic Associates hired a vendor, who assigned a person to manage scanning the requested records, processing them, managing fee collections and so forth. And of course, the vendor took 100 percent of the fees as its compensation.

In our case, we noticed errors that, though minor, made us feel uncomfortable with the quality of the work. Although there were no major breaches of confidentiality and no legal actions against us, we felt a general lack of control and confidence.

A Shared-services Solution

Our dissatisfaction with both the in-house and the outsourced options led us to be open-minded about ROI processing. Having experienced the worst of both worlds, we quickly grasped the potential when we heard about the "shared-services" approach used by MRO.

Under this model, MRO's ROI Online solution takes care of the "back-office" processes through its staff and its Web-based workflow. These are the more onerous tasks: invoicing, fulfillment (printing or media creation and mailing or e-mailing), collections and receiving telephone inquiries. Through shared services, much of the process is handled by knowledgeable people and specialized electronic interfaces designed for accuracy and efficiency. Thus, MRO leverages economies of scale and still can offer high service levels.

The Transition

We implemented ROI Online over the course of about one month. The total cost to get started amounted to \$1,200, which included a dedicated scanner. But MRO took that cost from its share of fee revenues, so we avoided any cash outlay. As for ongoing costs, the vendor charges a small monthly maintenance fee and shares the ROI fees it collects 50-50.

Coincidentally, we implemented ROI Online shortly after deploying an EHR system. The system accommodated our transition from paper to electronic records. By design, it gives us the flexibility either to scan in paper records or capture electronic records—using a Web print driver—directly from the EHR system.

The Expected Results—and More

With no ROI backlog and a share of the fees on our end, MRO's solution represents a win-win situation. We maintain responsibility and control for the aspects of the process we're interested in: fielding requests and locating records. That has restored our confidence in the ROI process.

Another advantage—one that I had not anticipated—boosts that confidence even further. The vendor double checks our work, providing "a second pair of eyes" to ensure that the records requested are the records being transmitted.

The shared services model has been a huge positive for us. Based on creative use of technology and our productive personal relationships with MRO, we've finally been able to meet all of our goals for ROI processing.

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