

## **Which Comes First?**

What a wonderful world we live in today where competition drives us to succeed. Right now the word “competitive” or any derivative of it can make even the strong hearted weak in the knees. However, for the first time ever we find ourselves in a feature rich market of development when it comes to technology.

Two technologies that are sharing the limelight are billing systems and imaging systems. Mandatory accreditation and downward pressure on the reimbursement dollar are forcing providers to make decisions about the future profitability of their business. In order to maintain their profitability, providers are faced with the decision to invest in improved technology or face uncertain futures. Many providers are faced with the daunting task of changing both their billing software and implementing an imaging program. The question “which comes first?” applies to more than poultry and has greater implications.

Unlike poultry, there is a correct answer when dealing with billing systems and imaging systems. The imaging system definitely comes first. After personally going through imaging implementation and then a billing system change it is imperative that the implementation of imaging comes first. Imaging implementation calls upon only one resource, cash or credit line while billing system implementation calls upon two resources much more heavily, cash and human resources. The decision of “which comes first?” should be based on two very important criteria, cash and human resources.

The first of the two criteria is cash. Imaging systems create cash. When implemented correctly and with the appropriate technology, imaging systems provide the ability to reduce direct and indirect costs. The ROI on imaging systems occurs rapidly by freeing up personnel that otherwise would have been chasing paper. One of the most affected areas is going to be Accounts Receivable. Let’s assume the following scenario. If you have your Accounts Receivable Specialists layered at 1000 accounts per FTE and you have 4000 accounts. Each A/R representative is spending 25% of their time (this figure is not uncommon) retrieving and returning patient charts, or in the situation of larger companies, waiting on them to be retrieved by a file clerk. After implementation of MedForce this process is instantaneous allowing A/R representatives to handle more accounts. Simply put, you have created one full time equivalent whose activity resource time can removed or reassigned.

Working denials and sorting through countless EOMB’s is another enormous task performed by Accounts Receivable. Both of these processes are all but automated with MedForce. With very little human intervention EOMB’s are filed conveniently in the patients files awaiting review. Denial letters are preformatted by denial code and ready to email, fax or mail without the Accounts Receivable representative ever leaving their chair. This speeds up denial resolution, reduces DSO and improves cash flow.

The second of the two criteria is human

resources. If you discuss changing billing systems with anyone that has survived the task be prepared for a drama equaled only by Shakespeare’s Greek Tragedies. Even the best conversions are a relentless tedium of going over each patient file to assure correct demographics, insurance numbers and equipment rental allocation were transferred correctly. This does not account for the patient files that do not cross over due to misplaced commas, hyphens, numbers and or spaces that need to be manually keyed into the new billing system. Implementing MedForce prior to billing system conversion will have two positive effects. Having the patient files, demographics, insurance numbers and EOMB’s readily accessible will drastically shorten the data transfer and validation time. Secondly, freeing up human resource time will allow you to designate someone to this process.

Although every business is different, the decision to grow and become more profitable is universal. Approaching technology may seem expensive in the short run, however this is not a short race. Endurance, persistence and critical thinking pay off. Businesses that were faced with and have made these decisions did so cautiously as well. However, after embracing the technology and making the change they have only one question, “why didn’t we do this sooner?” ■