

Members in Action: Implement Operational Solutions

Froedtert Health – Milwaukee, Wisc.

Patient-friendly Billing Improves the Patient Experience

Overview

To improve the patient experience, Froedtert Health commissioned a study that found that while satisfaction with clinical care was very high, the patient billing experience was not at the same level of satisfaction. Patients were receiving multiple bills from different providers within the same health system, including from their academic partner, the Medical College of Wisconsin (MCW). The health system encompasses eight hospitals, nearly 2,000 physicians and more than 45 health centers and clinics. On average, Froedtert Health sees 1.2 million patient visits annually. Given its patient experience focus, Froedtert Health set out to make the patient billing process more accessible and easier to understand for consumers by revamping billing administration.

To make their bills more patient friendly, Froedtert Health worked with MCW to provide patients consolidated statements. Leveraging the EPIC technology, they implemented the Single Business Office functionality, which allows integrated billing across the health care system. Froedtert also employs the MyChart functionality to allow patients to see all of their balances online and consolidate them if they choose.

The revamped experience is designed to make receiving and understanding the bill easier for the patients. The consolidated bills include charges from the hospital, physicians and other entities, such as the health system's surgery centers, in a single statement. Work is being done to add lab charges and integrate other partner organizations, such as dialysis, into the consolidated bill. Froedtert Health also changed billing language so billing statements are easier for patients to understand with fewer technical terms. A cost estimation tool for consumers to understand their cost is also offered either online through a patient portal or upon request.

Impact

Froedtert Health sees its work to improve the patient billing experience as part of a journey. "We've come a long way in tackling the low-hanging fruit pain points in the billing experience," says Scott Hawig, chief financial and chief administrative officer. "But we haven't made it consumer centric yet." As a result of the changes, patient satisfaction scores with regards to understanding bills have increased and bills are being paid faster. Yet, Paul Spencer, vice president of managed care and revenue cycle emphasized, "We're doing this because we want to make our patients happy and satisfied with us, not so much because we see a huge financial gain from doing it."



Future Goals

In the future, patients will have many more options including: consolidating payment plans for an increasing number of affiliated provider entities (e.g. labs), requesting text notifications and updates, or receiving a monthly statement with all consolidated balances similar to utility or credit card bills. By automating these functions, Froedtert Health hopes to reduce errors and allow patients to take greater control of the experience.

Froedtert Health also plans to enhance their cost estimation services to be more proactive so that patients have a better understanding upfront of what an appointment or service will cost. At present, the patient services team gives estimates when people request them. "In the future, we want to get people that information earlier in the process so there is no surprise on the back end and they know exactly what their expenses are going to be," Spencer explained.

Froedtert Health continues to work toward its goal state where the statements that the patient receives from the insurance company and the hospital always say the same thing. This is seen as a significant opportunity to reduce frustration for the patient.

Lessons Learned

While consolidating statements into a single bill may sound straightforward, Spencer and Hawig cautioned not to underestimate the back-office lift and importance of technology in improving the process. They emphasized the need to line up IT resources and to have partners be on the same platform. "Be ruthlessly aggressive about consolidating your billing activity," Scott Hawig noted.

They also noted that it is invaluable to have a dedicated person in the revenue office devoted to thinking about the financial engagement and experience of patients. Froedtert has a leader in the organization with the title of director of patient financial engagement, whose focus is implementing patient-friendly billing efforts.

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