

Allegan General Hospital Improves Revenue Cycle with Online Education

Allegan General Hospital (AGH) adopts BridgeFront's "Understanding the Revenue Cycle" online education to reduce patient registration errors, staff turnover and improve revenue collection



Issue: Current staff training program did not include systematic educational activities, was time consuming, and was costly

Solution: eLearning courses providing core education in revenue cycle fundamentals

Result: Faster training times and reduced registration errors. The actual training requires half to three quarters the regular time to train a new staff member.

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—Lori Thompson

BACKGROUND

Allegan General Hospital (AGH) is a not-for-profit, acute care facility located in western Michigan in a rural community with a population of approximately 17,000, servicing an area of approximately 41,000 residents. Allegan General Hospital serves a large population of self-employed construction and manufacturing workers as well as indigent, Medicaid and Medicare patients. This patient population indicates the hospital faces possible write-offs due to patients' inability to pay and shrinking reimbursements from Medicare and Medicaid.

Allegan General Hospital management realized that it was critical to train staff on how to properly register patients and reduce patient registration errors, resulting in lost time and reimbursement. Management also wanted staff to understand where their work fit in the Revenue Cycle and how errors cost the organization.

PATIENT REGISTRATION AND REVENUE COLLECTION CHALLENGES

"As is true in many hospitals, training on the revenue cycle and financial issues is typically only provided to financial staff. Yet, tasks performed in patient registration can have a negative impact on a hospital's revenue due to rework or rejection of patient claims," stated Lori Thompson, Allegan General Hospital Patient Access Manager. Thompson indicated that there are a number of issues that cause registration errors. The patient registration process and regulations are complex and often hard to understand. In addition, verification of payer information is important. Payer benefit information is often available via web sites and telephone access. But, it is time consuming and can be cumbersome to obtain complete and accurate information. Ensuring staff understand the importance of completing the verification steps and why it is important, is challenging. Denial of payment or rework of payment claims costs Allegan General Hospital both time and money.

TRAINING CHALLENGES

Thompson and other staff members trained new Patient Access staff on a one-to-one basis over a period of months using a training manual, various "watch and learn" experiences, and a verbal transfer of information approach. The material did not include systematic educational activities focused on the revenue cycle. Training a new Patient Access team member was a time consuming and costly process. Hospital employees in areas such as Patient Registration and Billing often have a high turnover rate, which is attributed to complexity of the job and employees feeling like they have inadequate training.

As healthcare organizations struggle with decreasing payments – write-offs and rework in the Revenue Cycle need to be eliminated. Today, many organizations are tapping into technology and process improvements to implement innovative solutions. One technique that is reducing turnover and rework of claims is structured core education on Revenue Cycle fundamentals for front-line employees.

Training existing Patient Access staff was also time consuming and a challenging task for Allegan General Hospital managers. Busy workloads made it difficult to put together training materials and present classes. Yet, it was vitally important to train staff about Revenue Cycle issues and regulations associated with registration tasks. Educating hospital staff and tackling reasons for claims rejections and denials are key to reducing re-work costs and optimizing reimbursement.

Allegan General Hospital managers realized they needed a comprehensive training program for their staff, which covered both patient registration and billing topics. The training needed to provide new and existing employees with an opportunity to gain a broader perspective of the Revenue Cycle processes, as well as, specific registration skills. The hospital needed a training program that included: ease-of-use and installation; met the needs of both existing and new employees; available when needed by the employee, and allowed managers to track staff progress.

EVALUATING TRAINING PROGRAMS

Thompson initially attended an educational session highlighting the features and benefits of implementing a structured education program for front-line Patient Access team members at a Michigan Alliance of Healthcare Access Professionals (MAHAP) meeting, delivered by Lorraine Schnelle, BridgeFront Founder & Executive Vice President. To further evaluate BridgeFront's products and services, Allegan General Hospital managers attended an online demonstration. BridgeFront's Revenue Cycle education program which includes over 80 courses, with 55+ hours of learning grouped into 11 course bundles and an extensive reference library. Educational activities are accessed via the Internet and available 24/7, so healthcare staff can learn when it is convenient for them. Printable job aids, reference hyperlinks and concrete skill-building activities are a part of the educational experience. At the end of each course is a post-test to make sure the trainee adequately understands the concepts. And students can "bookmark" any course page to simply

return to that section for review or take virtual notes using the "My Notes" function. Managers can create custom reports showing how much time students spent on the courses, grades and other information for each student. The BridgeFront.Com web site also includes return-on-investment (ROI) calculators, white papers and a question and answer knowledge base..

SOLUTION: BRIDGEFRONT'S CUSTOMIZED REVENUE CYCLE EDUCATION PROGRAM

Based upon the criteria provided from Allegan General Hospital, BridgeFront developed a customized "Understanding the Revenue Cycle" curriculum and learning experience. Thompson admits she was worried about the cost of the training program, but realized the expense was low when compared with costs associated with busy managers spending the time to prepare training and lost reimbursement when staff made patient registration mistakes due to their lack of understanding of fundamental aspects of their job.



"We develop custom learning plans for our clients," states Schnelle, "Organizations have different needs and issues. By listening and asking questions we can help revenue cycle managers and educators design one or more curriculums that can target specific education needs." Implementation of the education program at Allegan was easy. Within a week of signing BridgeFront's license agreement, the customized learning plan and staff logins were created and the Patient Access staff simply clicked on the URL provided to launch the "Understanding the Revenue Cycle" curriculum. Thompson indicated there were no problems with logging into the online courses and that BridgeFront was quick to respond when questions arose.

"UNDERSTANDING THE REVENUE CYCLE" EDUCATION OVERVIEW

Courses in the "Understanding the Revenue Cycle" curriculum provide an overview of the entire Revenue Cycle—from taking information during patient intake, through billing and collection. The goal of the educational program is to provide a broader base of knowledge about the Revenue Cycle, to help the students understand how their specific work fits in the Revenue Cycle, and how errors cost the organization money. Thompson states, "It is important that every staff member in all areas of the hospital understand the Revenue Cycle, what it is, understanding the importance of it and how what they do every day affects the cycle."

- Allegan General Hospital staff took the following courses:
- Introduction to the Revenue Cycle & Terminology
- Payer Identification
- Registration's Links to the UB-04
- Bill Submission Tools
- Coding Basics
- Understanding Reimbursement
- Compliance...the Buzz
- Denial Management 101

This learning plan focused on key revenue cycle concepts, including tips and techniques to ensuring accurate account information is obtained, a clean claim is generated, and timely payments are received. All existing Allegan General Hospital Patient Access staff must complete the training in three months. New hires in the Patient Access department go through the training in the first few weeks after starting their job. Students must have a score of 80% to pass a course. If a student re-takes a test, the questions are then changed using a BridgeFront's exam question database, so students don't

see the exact same questions every time. The Administrator for the training can see the scores obtained by students and may choose to provide additional individual help for a student who is having problems passing a course.

The expense was low when compared with the cost factors associated with the time required by busy managers to prepare training and lost reimbursement caused when staff made patient registration mistakes due to their lack of understanding of fundamental aspects of their job.

BENEFITS OF "UNDERSTANDING THE REVENUE CYCLE" EDUCATION

"Starting a new employee out with BridgeFront training was one of the best things I have ever done with a new hire. I love it, because it is easy to use, comprehensive, systematic and easily understood," Thompson states. "Using the BridgeFront Revenue Cycle education program has been a big success at Allegan General Hospital, resulting in faster training times and reduced registration errors. The actual training requires between half and three quarters the regular time to train a new staff member. The employee has a good understanding of where the Revenue Cycle information is used, why it is so important that registration is done right and how it impacts the entire facility."

Dan Burtnett, FHFMA, Interim Director at Allegan General Hospital Patient Financial Services and Patient Access used the BridgeFront education program to train new employees in the Patient Financial Services (PFS) department. "BridgeFront's products are very thorough, user-friendly and their personnel are tremendous people to work with," Burtnett states. "They custom-made a grouping of studies for a new Biller that was perfect, it encompassed a variety of material from the detail of the UB-04 to understanding the Revenue Cycle. Great reports and tracking for leadership. The setup process was simple and the cost was reasonable. This was my first time using these tools for new employee education, I would not go back!! And, great comments from the users."

FUTURE: ADDITIONAL ONLINE EDUCATION PLANS

BridgeFront's online courses can also satisfy many Continuing Education requirements. Above and beyond the

required training Thompson encouraged AGH staff to take the Certified Healthcare Access Associate (CHAA) test to become a CHAA certified Registrar. BridgeFront's courses are used as part of the study materials in preparation for the test. In addition, Allegan General Hospital purchased a medical clinic and is considering training the clinical staff using the same "Understanding the Revenue Cycle" curriculum, and considering BridgeFront's many other course libraries for training.

SUMMARY

Implementing BridgeFront's "Understanding the Revenue Cycle" online curriculum has allowed Allegan General Hospital to drastically cut the time required to train staff on the Revenue Cycle and patient registration concepts. This decision saves AGH both time and money and has given the staff many tools to reduce registration errors. Now, staff better understands how their job fits in the hospital's Revenue Cycle, resulting in a reduced turnover rate.

ABOUT ALLEGAN GENERAL HOSPITAL

Allegan General Hospital is a not-for-profit community hospital located in Allegan, Michigan that provides a wide range of healthcare services, including surgery, diagnostics, emergency, inpatient services and serves as an acute care facility. The hospital is governed by an 11 member board of trustees. The original Allegan General Hospital was incorporated in May, 1938 as the Allegan Health Center. Allegan Hospital's mission is to provide exceptional, compassionate, personalized healthcare to their community. For more information on Allegan General Hospital, visit www.aghosp.org.

ABOUT BRIDGEFRONT

BridgeFront is a young, fast growing company that believes in delivering exceedingly high quality products and services that meet the growing needs of healthcare organizations headquartered in Portland, Oregon. BridgeFront first began in 2002 with the most comprehensive library available on HIPAA then added 300 titles in Nursing CE, Long Term Care, Regulatory Compliance, OSHA, Joint Commission and Revenue Cycle. BridgeFront believes in providing comprehensive, yet user-friendly online courses. For more information on BridgeFront's products and services, visit www.BridgeFront.com.



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