CASE STUDY

Syracuse Community Health Center Reenergizes Its Financial Foundation

Syracuse Community Health Center operates three clinics, eight school-based health centers, a center at a local community college, and a men's shelter. They offer primary care, pediatrics, obstetrics and gynecology, eye care, dental care, podiatry, behavioral health, and walk-in care. They are also developing a training program for certified medical assistants.

More than 90 percent of patients fall within 200 percent of federal poverty or below. Managed Medicaid accounts for about 75 percent of the payer mix and regular Medicaid accounts for about 10% with the remainder divided between commercial and self-pay.

"We're invested in the community," explains Carol Jones, billing manager at Syracuse Community Health Center. "We've been here for many years—and we're here to stay. We're a place of choice for healthcare services in the community and, most important, we care. We reach out to everyone." .

THE CHALLENGE

To sustain their community-based approach to healthcare delivery, Syracuse Community Health Center had to improve the administrative and financial underpinnings for running the organization.

"We relied heavily on manual paper billing. We were holding our own and able to survive financially, but we recognized that we needed to enhance our revenue stream. We realized we needed a new EHR and practice management (PM) system that had greater electronic capabilities," explains Jones.

Syracuse Community Health Center went live with NextGen Enterprise in April 2014 and then partnered with NextGen Revenue Cycle Management (RCM) Services in July 2016.

"When we converted over to NextGen Enterprise, it was a struggle. We were moving away from a sure thing—a piece of paper. There were stacks and stacks of encounter forms. Providers did not want to give up that paper form."

THE SOLUTION

Initially, providers and staff at Syracuse Community Health Center weren't forced to transfer to electronic records. They could elect to transition or not. Then a new administrative team came in and set a deadline for going all electronic.

Training proves essential

"A key piece was the training," says Jones. "Because it was something new, there was a lot of resistance. When providers realized it was going to be a good thing and make their jobs easier and more efficient, they came on board."

Carol Jones admits that they are still making changes to their unique system, but feel that NextGen Healthcare addresses their needs in a timely manner and listens to them to help make things more efficient.

"Providers and staff saw that NextGen Healthcare listened to us. They [NextGen Healthcare] recognized Syracuse Community Health Center is unique. We're not like everybody else. They sought to address our unique needs," says Jones.

THE BENEFITS

"We were able to interface the EHR, the practice management (PM) system, and the electronic dental record into one integrated package," says Jones. "I've seen an improvement in our financial picture. I attribute it not only to a great team here— providers, staff, and patients—but also the NextGen Healthcare platform itself, which is the engine that drives it."

Speed to payment

One major improvement: speed to payment.

"A typical insurance payer won't even look at a paper claim for 14 days. Then they might sit on it for another 14 days," explains Jones. "You can't imagine the impact moving to an electronic platform has with cash flow. I feel the strongest benefit for us is electronic submission of claims to all payers and electronic remittances."

The NextGen RCM Services team is responsible for posting remittances and processing of payments. Jones acknowledges their level of expertise is also a great help to Syracuse Community Health Center.

Easier compliance

In 2019, Syracuse Community Health Center upgraded its platform, which made it more user friendly and enabled better access to metrics. NextGen Enterprise also makes it easier for their staff to stay compliant with regulatory requirements—HIPAA and others—as well as new billing guidelines. This would prove especially important when the COVID-19 pandemic shook the world of healthcare delivery.

Support for response to COVID

"At the start of the pandemic, we were getting updates from the state and federal government on topics such as billing and regulatory compliance—perhaps two and three times a week. Once we had new guidelines, we reached out to NextGen Healthcare and NextGen RCM Services to help make certain that we'd be able to remain compliant. The HIPAA piece was very important; there were many questions about HIPAA compliance as it related to COVID."

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Syracuse Community Health Center was designated as the premiere testing site in Onondaga County, New York. Testing services were utilized by many people from other surrounding counties as well.

"We had to get all the diagnosis and procedure codes in order and capture key patient demographics to meet regulatory guidelines and for future auditing purposes," explains Jones. "Using NextGen Healthcare solutions helped us streamline what started out as a paper process and quickly evolved into a streamlined electronic process. "

Help for vaccine administration

"We've also received help with administering COVID vaccines," says Jones. "We had daily meetings to ensure everyone was on the same page and our systems were in place, including those involving NextGen Healthcare. COVID continues to be a challenge but we're fortunate to have the assistance of NextGen RCM Services to help get the system set up, establish transaction data sets, make certain coding is correct, get the claims sent out in timely manner, and receive reimbursement."

Collaborate for better results

Amy Ellingworth, chief financial officer at Syracuse Community Health Center, describes the practice's collaboration with NextGen RCM Services.

"We receive monthly executive summaries with revenue statistics. Not only do we provide this information to our Finance Committee and Board of Directors, but we also use it internally to decide on which areas to focus. Earlier this year, we focused on our unbilled encounters based on the monthly report from NextGen RCM Services. This has enabled us to decrease our accounts receivable significantly over the last quarter."

Both Jones and Ellingworth attribute much of the progress the practice has made to their collaboration with Marc Miranda, director of client management at NextGen Healthcare.

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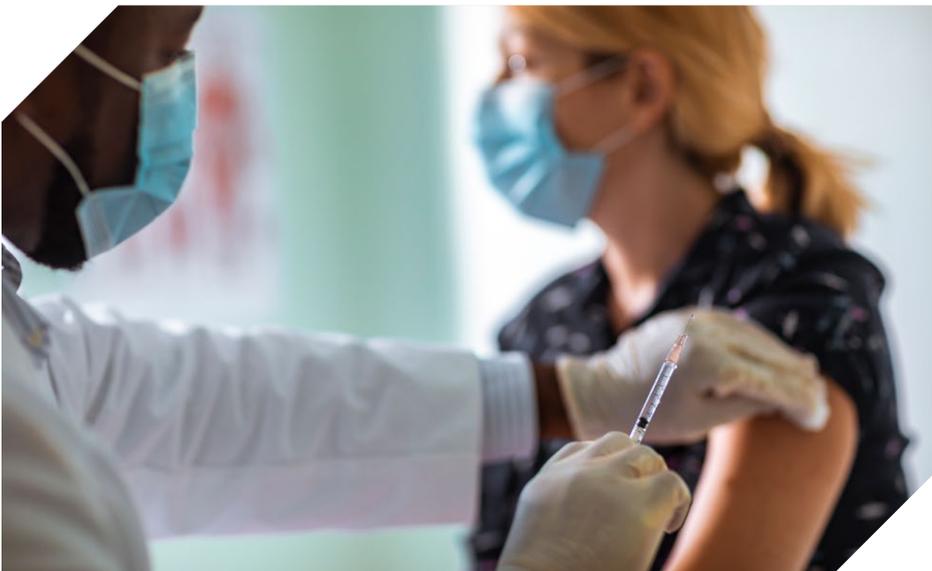
"Marc, with his expertise and experience provided us with a bit of extra input," says Jones. "It always helps to have someone on the other side of the table share information and speak honestly. It's allowed us to focus on the key indicators that we need to continue the path to maximize revenues and reimbursement."

Miranda attributes their progress to the open-minded and cooperative outlook of the team at Syracuse Community Health Center.

"I bring a lot of data to our meetings. Syracuse Community Health Center pays attention to the data. They discuss it with an open mind. We hold sessions where they can speak openly about RCM and our services. That's helped them to focus on what matters most—areas of the business that will return the most value for their patients and their bottom line," Miranda explains. "For example, net collections in the last 12 months increased by about 20 percent."

Miranda notes that Syracuse Community Health Center is open to new products and services. Recently, they implemented the NextGen Charge Review Rules Engine, which uses automation to increase the accuracy of billing by checking charges against pre-programmed coding rules and automatically making corrections.

"Within the last three months, their denial count has been reduced by over 10 percent because of the rules engine. Syracuse Community Health Center is very open to change. That's why I think they've seen a lot of progress, and I attribute it to leaders like Carol and Amy," says Miranda.

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HOW CAN WE HELP?

Partner with us at **855-510-6398** or **results@nextgen.com**

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