Hallmark Health System boosts revenue and significantly improves unbilled A/R with integrated solutions

Overview
Hallmark Health System had multiple motivations for streamlining its health information management (HIM) and revenue cycle processes to prepare for the future and the prospect of value-based care.

“As a multi-hospital system serving Boston’s northern communities, it was important for us to standardize coding and clinical documentation improvement (CDI) processes across the board,” explains Nancy Cloutier, system director of health information management, Hallmark Health System. "We also wanted to prepare for ICD-10 with state-of-the art solutions for coding and our primarily manual CDI program. Ultimately, however, our goal was to prepare our organization for the future of health care."

Along with these aims came significant challenges in finding and retaining qualified coders to meet the organization’s needs through the ICD-10 transition and going forward.

Cloutier and her team needed a comprehensive set of solutions that would:

• **Streamline coding and CDI processes** to power increased efficiency, better communication among teams and physicians, and improved documentation quality.

• **Provide trained, qualified coders** to address shortages and changing organizational needs.

• **Deliver expertise and guidance** to maximize the benefits of coding and CDI technology, navigate the ICD-10 transition, and prepare Hallmark Health to thrive in a value-based care model.

With combined Optum360 technology, services and consulting, Hallmark Health System:

- Improved documentation and coding processes, enhancing revenue capture by $1.3 million.
- Improved unbilled accounts receivable (A/R) by over $8 million.
- Reduced coding backlog by over 80 percent for inpatient, and over 50 percent for outpatient.
- Achieved a smooth ICD-10 transition with no significant impact on A/R.
- Increased physician query response rate from ~30 percent to over 90 percent.
Solutions and results
An integrated approach yields compound benefits

The Hallmark Health team knew that a coordinated strategy would deliver the modernization they were looking to provide for their coding and CDI operations, as well as improve key financial metrics.

“We wanted to bring our entire HIM operation to the next level,” says Cloutier. “Working with Optum360® allowed us to bring in a full suite of solutions, including a unified technology platform, the coding services we desperately needed, and consulting services to guide our transition and help optimize outcomes.”

The multi-faceted approach was a key differentiator for the Hallmark Health team, who closely evaluated several different options before choosing Optum360 solutions. They found the Optum360 unified coding and CDI platform using the proprietary Optum® LifeCode® natural language processing (NLP) engine particularly impressive. The LifeCode engine powers both Optum Enterprise Computer-Assisted Coding and Optum CDI 3D, enabling coding and CDI teams to work with the same data platform, where they can communicate and share immediate updates.

“One of the things that impressed us most was the NLP engine and its ability to improve over time, both highlighting abbreviations and diagnoses for coders as well as finding cases with the greatest opportunity for clinical documentation improvement based on the markers,” says Cloutier.

In addition, Hallmark Health opted to work with an Optum360 consultant who collaborated with teams on-site for the initial rollout and beyond. “Our implementation went very smoothly,” says Leighann Michitson, coding and CDI operations manager, Hallmark Health System. “Our consultant truly understood our goals and walked us through the whole process. He kept the project moving ahead efficiently and smoothly, helping us address any issues that came up along the way. He felt just like one of our team.”

One of the first steps in the process was to implement Enterprise CAC and connect the Optum360 coders with the organization. To lessen the impact on Hallmark Health employees, all but one of its coders were hired by Optum360 and offered flexible work opportunities in its coding services group.

“We had been extremely challenged to find and retain experienced coders, especially those that were trained in ICD-10,” says Michitson. “The Optum360 coders were a lifesaver for us. They had been using the new code set for years and were ready to dive in — we saw no significant losses in productivity with the ICD-10 transition. We were back to baseline within two months.”

Stakeholders throughout the organization have noticed the positive shifts and outcomes. “The goal from my perspective is always making sure our organization is being paid fairly for the services we provide,” says Mike Turilli, vice president of finance, Hallmark Health System. “Having all of the Optum360 solutions has truly helped transform our organization. Well-documented care and maximizing our efficiencies translates to revenue enhancement.”
**Better communication, better documentation, better outcomes**

Combining the Optum360 consulting, coding service and integrated Enterprise CAC and CDI 3D platform proved to be a powerful combination for Hallmark Health System.

“The whole suite of solutions working together has enabled us to achieve some incredible results,” says Maureen Quilty, clinical documentation improvement specialist coordinator Hallmark Health System.

The organization is now enjoying a more connected approach to coding and CDI, the benefits of which are clear in the outcomes.

“Our unbilled A/R has never been lower than it is now, which was one of our primary goals,” Cloutier says. “We’ve also seen an improvement in our coding backlog and in key metrics such as case mix index and ratings for SOI and ROM, which means we’re better reflecting the quality of care we’re giving to our patients. I attribute it all to both the technology and the services Optum360 brought to the table.”

Not only is Hallmark Health seeing stronger financial results, but the response from physicians has been positive as well, thanks in part to 100 percent record review for all payers and effective query identification.

“This initiative has helped us improve alignment with our physicians,” says Cloutier. Michitson agrees. “The physicians are very impressed with CDI 3D. Because our queries are more accurate and routed within their workflow, our query response rate has improved from approximately 30 percent to well over 90 percent. That really speaks to the physicians’ adoption of the solution and new processes.”

Michitson says the smooth transition and new processes have allowed HIM and financial leaders to focus on the future. “With all the time that we’ve saved, we’re now free to concentrate on other initiatives throughout our health system, quality being a major focus,” she says.

From a finance leader perspective, Turilli agrees: “I think everything we’ve done has positioned us well for what the future of health care and payment models may bring.”

**Outstanding support and partnership**

While navigating the ICD-10 transition, integrating Optum360 coding services and streamlining Hallmark Health System’s workflows and processes was an ambitious undertaking, the team agrees that the transformation — and the results — have been well worth the effort.

“I know some other organizations are still struggling to get unbilled A/R on track and find coders,” says Cloutier. “I’m so proud of where we are today. Partnering with Optum360 was definitely the right choice for Hallmark Health System. Not only are we seeing results that exceeded our expectations, but we are now in a position to be able to focus on the future.”

Cloutier says the organization’s improved results accurately reflect the high quality of care it provides to the community, and indicates a healthy revenue cycle, which assures that Hallmark Health can continue to serve its community today and into the future.

Turilli agrees. “While ultimately, much about future financial and reimbursement models remains unknown, being able to accurately document the quality care we provide sets us up for fair payment and success under any kind of future model, including value-based care.”
Throughout their journey, the Hallmark staff has enjoyed the feeling of partnership that characterizes their work with Optum360. “I feel like our goals are their goals,” says Michitson. Cloutier notes that the Optum360 team’s responsiveness and willingness to work through challenges together has been a key factor in their success. “They’re right there for us when questions come up or to resolve any issues,” she says. “That kind of continued responsiveness, even after implementation, means a lot.”

“Working with Optum360 has been a great experience,” agrees Michitson. “Everyone involved has helped to maximize our efforts and results. When I think about where we were before and where we are now, it’s like a dream that’s been realized — it has been amazing to see it all come together.”

Turilli sums up the Hallmark team’s sense of preparedness and future-focused stance: “I’m confident that with Optum360, we have the technology, services and outputs that will be critical as we move forward,” he says.

**About Hallmark Health System**

Hallmark Health System is the premier, charitable provider of vital health services to Boston’s northern communities. The system includes Lawrence Memorial Hospital of Medford; Melrose Wakefield Hospital, Melrose; Hallmark Health Cancer Center, Stoneham; The CHEM Center for MRI, Stoneham; The CHEM Center for Radiation Oncology, Stoneham; Hallmark Health Medical Center, Reading; Hallmark Health VNA and Hospice; Lawrence Memorial/Regis College Nursing and Radiography Programs, Medford and Hallmark Health Medical Associates, Inc. Hallmark Health is affiliated with Massachusetts General Hospital for cardiology and Tufts Medical Center for neonatology.

**About Optum360**

Optum360 simplifies the business of health care by delivering health information, services and technology to hospitals, physicians and health systems. Our 7,700 performance experts provide revenue cycle leadership, innovation and operational excellence to eliminate the inefficiencies in health care and prepare for value-based reimbursement. By creating solutions that leverage our resources, relationships and unparalleled industry perspective, we partner with care providers to fulfill their strategic vision and enable them to focus on care and healing.