Thibodaux Regional Medical Center is a 185-bed acute care hospital located in Thibodaux, La. Thibodaux Regional provides inpatient and outpatient care for the people of Lafourche Parish and seven surrounding parishes, and is nationally recognized for its quality care, cost efficiency, innovation and outstanding patient experience.

**Background**
Like those at most health care facilities, managers at Thibodaux Regional Medical Center were concerned about the transition to ICD-10 coding. In 2011, well in advance of the original 2013 implementation deadline, they started seeking strategies to help make a smooth transition and offset any clinical and financial impacts.

### Highlights
Optum360 consulting, coding auditing and education helped Thibodaux Regional Medical Center:
- Increase outpatient CPT coding accuracy by 22 percent
- Increase ICD-10-CM outpatient diagnosis accuracy from 85 to 95 percent
- Smoothly navigate the ICD-10 transition
- Continue to make operational and accuracy improvements
Challenges

“We knew that ICD-10 was coming and that we had to educate our coders,” says Mikki Medine, HIM director at Thibodaux Regional. “What we didn’t realize at the time was the impact that ICD-10 would have throughout the entire hospital. We needed someone to guide us and tell us which areas would be affected and what we had to do to prepare for that.”

Thibodaux Regional developed an RFP to identify a consulting partner that could help with its ICD-10 initiative across the entire organization. Five vendors were considered, and after a rigorous procurement process and analysis, Optum360 was selected. “We chose Optum360 because of the success they were having with ICD-10 support in other facilities,” says Courtney Crozier, HIM coding manager for Thibodaux Regional.

Solutions

Optum360 provided a comprehensive suite of consulting services that were instrumental in the organization’s seamless transition to ICD-10. The consultants formed work groups across the facility in every area that would be affected, including health information management (HIM), clinical documentation improvement (CDI), information technology (IT), finance, physician practice and clinical care. The scope of services included training, resource planning, testing, remediation and migration.

Optum360 created a road map and looked for ways to make the transition with minimal disruption. “They identified areas where we needed to put a plan together and pointed out areas where we were already doing a good job,” says Medine. Crozier added, “One of the biggest benefits that Optum360 brought to the table was project management. They had somebody who was totally focused on ICD-10 and worked with all departments to coordinate the effort. As a result, the implementation went off without a hitch.”

The area of greatest impact was in HIM, where Optum360 provided:

- Consulting and project management
- Coder training
- Coding auditing and education
- Post-ICD-10 support

Consulting and project management. Optum360 consultants helped Thibodaux Regional’s HIM leadership anticipate and proactively address issues before they became problems. These included:

- Dual coding in ICD-9 and ICD-10 for 12 months before the mandatory implementation. As a result, coders were confident and proficient when October 2015 rolled around.
- Placing an ICD-10 certified coder in the registration office for the first few days after go-live to ensure that HIM received a valid order compatible with the new code set requirements.
- Providing education to clinics to ensure compliance in outpatient history and physicals as well as orders.
Optum360 also developed a solution for managing “recurring account codes,” after its consultants recognized that the codes would be a problem when the ICD-10 switchover occurred in October 2015. “Since the September codes would be in ICD-9, we would have had to recode thousands of accounts in October if we didn’t do something,” says Medine. “Optum360 worked with us to develop a process to systematically handle this in advance.”

Another significant benefit that Optum360 brought to the table was the ability to reach out to other clients and compare notes about obstacles and opportunities in their ICD-10 preparation. This shared knowledge across a number of organizations enabled Optum360 to establish best practices that benefited all. “We were able to compare notes with other facilities and determine the best way to address obstacles as they arose,” says Crozier.

**ICD-10 coder training.** Before the start of dual coding, Optum360 trained all Thibodaux Regional coders on ICD-10. The intensive training modules provided a deeper understanding and helped the coders navigate the new code set. The coders repeated the training modules again just before the go-live deadline.

“Repeating the ICD-10 training modules really helped,” says Medine. “You go through something once when you are inexperienced and it is hard to retain everything. Going through it again, after the coders had the dual-coding experience under their belts, really helped boost accuracy.”

**Coding auditing and education.** Thibodaux Regional’s transition strategy also included coding auditing and customized follow-up education. “We set up an auditing and education program for inpatient, outpatient and professional coding as well as clinical documentation,” says Medine. “The program has brought significant increases in accuracy and was key in helping us make a smooth transition.”

Optum360 began coding audits in February 2015, well before the transition deadline. The audit reviews focused on verifying the quality of the coded data and identifying ICD-10-related documentation improvement opportunities, including gaps in specificity and any potential missed query opportunities. After each audit, Optum360 coding auditors conducted one-hour remote webinars for Thibodaux Regional HIM coding and CDI staff. These sessions provided a refresher on ICD-10-CM/PCS coding guidelines based on trends and issues identified through the audits. They also included CDI template recommendations, which were a catalyst for physician buy-in for clinical document improvement.

“We continued the inpatient account audits until March 2016, six months after ICD-10 go-live,” says Medine. “The coders really responded to the customized education sessions, and it showed in their improved accuracy, which consistently exceeded our goals and standards.” Once HIM leadership felt that coders had a handle on inpatient charts, they shifted their focus to the outpatient and professional services coding, particularly ICD-10 procedures and CPT® coding, and the results have been impressive there as well.

**Post-transition support.** Thibodaux Regional originally planned to have an ICD-10 certified, accredited trainer on site one week per quarter to identify enterprise issues and opportunities and present recommendations. However, the program was so successful that it eliminated the need for continued quarterly assistance just months after the transition. The Optum360 consulting team achieved its goal of stepping aside even sooner than anticipated, an important objective of its engagement philosophy.
Results

The Optum360 long-standing consulting engagement at Thibodaux Regional has delivered impressive results.

**Increased inpatient DRG accuracy.** The audits and the customized training that follows each audit have led to significant improvements in accuracy. For example, inpatient DRG accuracy rose from 94.1 percent shortly after ICD-10 go-live to 97.4 percent three months later, in December 2015. The inpatient DRG accuracy is now consistently 98 percent or higher.

**Increased outpatient coding accuracy.** The improvement in outpatient coding accuracy has been even more dramatic. In September 2015, outpatient coding accuracy was at 85 percent. In June 2016, HIM leadership refocused the Optum360 monthly audits and education on outpatient charts. As a result, by August 2016, outpatient coding accuracy was up to 95 percent — a 12 percent increase. “I credit our accuracy improvement to the constant feedback we get from Optum360,” says Medine. “Having monthly chart audits and follow-up sessions with our coders has been very positive. Our coders are just getting better and better.”

**Increased CPT accuracy.** The organization’s outpatient CPT procedure coding accuracy improved from 77 percent on dual-coded charts in September 2015 to 89 percent a month later, when ICD-10 was live. By January 2016 it had risen to 94 percent — a 22 percent increase in four months. “The area I was most worried about across the board was procedures because the coding had changed so much from ICD-9 to ICD-10,” says Crozier. “The audits and the follow-up really helped. Now we’re doing the same thing for outpatient coding and seeing results there as well.”

**Ongoing process improvement.** Thibodaux will continue to strategically implement coding audits and education in the future. “They’ve been invaluable, and we will continue to use them to ensure that our skills aren’t dropping and to support us educationally when new changes are introduced,” says Medine.