

Intermountain Healthcare cracks the code on complete clinical documentation for complete reimbursement.

Challenge

- Create more clinically accurate documentation
- Improve physician engagement
- Properly document patient severity and acuity
- Receive proper payment for services
- Elevate quality scores

Solution

- Implemented J. A. Thomas & Associates (now part of Nuance) Compliant Documentation Management Program® (CDMP®)
- Deployed clinical staff as documentation specialists

Results

- 4%-6% case mix improvement
- Improved physician documentation
- Improved teamwork—coders, documentation specialists and physicians

Salt Lake City-based Intermountain Healthcare was not getting full reimbursement for care because of a difference in the way physicians documented care and the way coders interpreted that documentation for reimbursement. To bridge that difference and ensure capture of acuity and severity, Intermountain implemented J. A. Thomas & Associates (now part of Nuance) Compliant Documentation Management Program® (CDMP®). Intermountain Healthcare is a nonprofit health system comprising 22 hospitals, and 1,100 employed physicians at more than 185 clinics.



“If we had not implemented CDMP we would still have that gap between the level of care we’re really providing and what we’re able to document.”

Doug Smith, Region CFO Intermountain Healthcare
Salt Lake City, Utah

Implementation.

In 2006, Intermountain selected Nuance’s Dragon® Medical eScription on-demand platform for computer-aided medical transcription (CAMT), and with it, Nuance JATA Compliant Documentation Management Program (CDMP), a fully managed, end-to-end improvement program that touches all the critical aspects of an institution’s clinical documentation process. Initially, Nuance JATA looked for documentation improvement opportunities within a sample of charts, and based on the analysis, estimated the potential for improvement in Intermountain’s Case Mix Index. Once the objectives were set, the Nuance JATA team managed everything: Customizing and integrating the technology tools, and providing peer-to-peer instruction for physicians, nurses, coders, and administrators to ensure everyone’s successful program use. Most importantly, Nuance JATA continuously monitored and supported the solution to make sure it meets all stated objectives.

Right code, right reimbursement.

“There was a real gap between the coding language and the documentation language that physicians used, and it was keeping us from properly recording the severity and acuity of our patients,” said Doug Smith, CFO.

“When physicians leave things out or aren’t specific enough, we can be paid the wrong DRG. It is important for us to help physicians bridge that gap and so we can code properly,” said Smith.

Now, Nuance JATA-trained nurses look for the proper documentation and talk to the physicians while the patient is still in the hospital, clarifying documentation to ensure proper coding.

“They evaluate what a physician has documented, to identify where he or she doesn’t realize more specificity is necessary for proper documentation and coding. Obviously, coding drives to a large degree what is paid under a DRG system, and we want it to be accurate.”

Under new value-based payment models, acuity and severity are key to substantiate the necessity of care, which, in turn, determines the level of reimbursement. Accurate documentation that reflects the actual morbidity of a patient population leads to higher severity reimbursement. With Nuance JATA CDMP, Intermountain is less concerned about the impact on payments, and more focused on trying to be accurate. It has made a difference in the accuracy of DRGs, and Intermountain has realized an increase in Case Mix Index, due to more specificity in the documentation and more accuracy with the documentation and the coding.

In addition, by improving the specificity and accuracy of documentation, CDMP helps Intermountain defend against RAC or other post audits.

“I’m interested in making sure we get paid properly for what we do, and that calls for measuring the severity and the acuity of our patients correctly and completely,” said Smith.

Teamwork matters.

“There’s a lot of frustration for physicians, for nurses and for patients when certain pieces—like coding and medical documentation—don’t match up,” said Smith.

To improve accuracy long-term, Nuance JATA is helping Intermountain improve documentation at its source: the physician. That feedback comes from Intermountain’s clinical documentation specialists (CDSs), CDMP-trained intermediaries with both clinical and coding knowledge that interface with physicians to help them understand—in their language—how to improve documentation for complete reimbursement.

“In an ideal world, physicians, clinical documentation specialists, and coders are on the same page in terms of what’s going on with the patient. The Nuance JATA program fosters that,” said Smith.

“Our experience with Nuance JATA has been excellent. They brought us a complete program, and we achieved great outcomes. Our Case Mix Index has improved because of more accurate documentation. In the last few years, we have won “Top 100” hospital awards, and others that measure quality metrics. I really believe our emphasis on accurate documentation and knowing the severity and acuity of the patients helps us to be evaluated properly.”

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Physicians are changing their documentation because of the feedback they’re receiving, closing the gap between how they were taught to document in medical school and actual coding rules. They have invited CDSs to talk to them about what they can do to improve, they’re excited about it and want to up their game in terms of accuracy of documentation specificity—and they share that excitement with physicians at other hospitals in our organization.

Sharing the success.

Since its initial implementation at Intermountain North Region hospitals, Nuance JATA CDMP has been expanded to most of the hospitals in the system. “We saw the benefits of this solution early on, and they

outweigh its cost,” said Smith. “Our experience with Nuance JATA has been excellent. They brought us a complete program, and we achieved great outcomes. Our Case Mix Index has improved because of more accurate documentation. In the last few years, we have won “Top 100” hospital awards, and others that measure quality metrics. I really believe our emphasis on accurate documentation and knowing the severity and acuity of the patients helps us to be evaluated properly.”

To learn more about how Nuance Healthcare can help you improve financial performance, raise the quality of care, and increase clinician satisfaction, please contact us at 877-805-5902 or visit www.nuance.com/healthcare.

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