



## The Emergence Of Outsourced MPI Management

*Tapping outside expertise helps hospitals improve data integrity and reduce costs while achieving a variety of clinical and administrative goals and objectives.*

By Beth Haenke Just, MBA, RHIA, FAHIMA, and CEO and President of Just Associates

Just as release-of-information (ROI), transcription and coding have benefited from outsourcing, so too can master patient index (MPI) management. Advances in remote connectivity coupled with the growing importance of eliminating and preventing duplicate records to increase safety and quality and reduce costs are driving a growing interest in outsourcing MPI maintenance.

Outsourcing makes sense, given the role effective MPI management plays in any hospital's data integrity strategy. A well-managed MPI ensures that the patient information used in nearly every aspect of care and administration is clean and accurate, mitigating the risk of treatment delays or inappropriate care decisions made based on inaccurate or incomplete information.

Efficient MPI management also reduces administrative costs, including those associated with reconciling duplicate records and longer registration times. Additional reductions are realized from the elimination of the duplicate diagnostic tests that can be necessary when the appropriate record cannot be located.

Further elevating the importance of effective MPI management is the emergence of new initiatives, such as Accountable Care Organizations (ACOs) and Patient Centered Medical Homes (PCMHs), and an increased emphasis on advancing more established ones such as Health Information Exchanges (HIEs) and Regional Health Information Organizations (RHIOs). Crucial to the short- and long-term success of all these concepts is the accurate exchange of valid patient data.

Also at play is its impact on a hospital's ability to efficiently achieve Meaningful Use. In particular, eliminating duplicates from the MPI allows for a more accurate count of unique patients to which certain criteria must be applied.

Despite the numerous benefits that can be realized from an effectively managed MPI, many hospitals face significant obstacles in achieving the necessary level of efficiency in the process. This is where outsourcing can have the greatest impact.

### RESOURCE, PROCESS CHALLENGES

The challenge facing hospitals in managing their MPI is two-fold: 1)

dedicating the necessary resources and 2) finding an effective and efficient way of eliminating existing issues and reducing the likelihood future ones will develop.

The reality is that most current MPI management processes are primarily manual and therefore prone to human error. In fact, many hospitals use rudimentary reports as their primary tool for identifying duplicates and spreadsheets for tracking them. The process itself is also time-consuming and labor-intensive, requiring dedicated human resources and special expertise that few hospitals can retain.

Limited resources also prevent many hospitals from employing a more efficient technology-enabled "assembly line" approach to validating and reconciling possible duplicates. It is a process wherein individual strengths are leveraged throughout the process and technology enables the simultaneous viewing of hundreds of "pairs" of potential duplicates for more rapid reconciliation.

Instead, hospitals must rely on the far less efficient strategy of having one person—who may or may not have specific training and who typically will have other assigned duties—handle the process from start to finish, one record at a time.

Additional challenges include declining reimbursements and tightening budgets that make it increasingly difficult for hospitals to maintain sufficient staff levels dedicated to fully and effectively manage the MPI. It is a problem that is further aggravated by the increase in consolidations and the number of physician practices being acquired by hospitals, both of which necessitate integration of divergent MPIs.

Finally, implementation of new electronic medical record (EMR) and computerized provider order entry (CPOE) systems makes maintaining data integrity an even more daunting task, particularly when problems must be corrected manually.

### A NEW TWIST ON AN OLD IDEA

Its ability to address the plethora of issues impacting data integrity and process efficiencies is driving more hospitals and healthcare organizations to seek outside assistance in managing their MPI. It is this growing demand—coupled with the impact the MPI has on everything

from Meaningful Use compliance to costs to safety and quality—that has given rise to outsourced MPI management services.

The idea of outsourcing such a critical aspect of health information management (HIM) is not without precedent. According to some accounts, outsourcing is a \$4 trillion a year venture, as hospital administrators and HIM directors outsource various functions without affecting their core competencies.

For example, medical transcription has long been outsourced to address ongoing workforce shortages and control costs. Most institutions pay, on average, 28-36% more for in-house transcription than they would for the same service if it were outsourced. A two-year study also found that hospitals could save as much as 33-38% a year by using outsourced transcription services.

Release of Information (ROI) is another function that is frequently outsourced to save costs and reduce the provider's liability should information be improperly released. An estimated 80% of hospitals outsource ROI, in part to avoid incurring fines of \$50,000 to \$1.5 million that can be levied against a provider that fails to adhere to HIPAA requirements.

A third popular area for outsourcing is coding, particularly in light of the ongoing coder shortage that makes it difficult for hospitals to recruit and retain sufficiently qualified staff to manage volumes. Outsourcing enables understaffed HIM departments to stay on top of their coding needs, reducing backlogs and speeding up billing and the revenue cycle. And, because these coders typically possess specific expertise, outsourcing agencies can often evaluate and correct problems with coding processes.

Outsourcing MPI management will deliver results similar to those of ROI, transcription and coding, including increased productivity, efficiency and accuracy. It will also position hospitals to maximize the impact of their IT initiatives, such as deployment of EHRs, at multiple clinical and operational levels.

As an initial step, best practices call for analyzing the entire MPI database to identify potential duplicates. This can be done either with existing EHR/EMPI systems, depending upon the sophistication of their record-matching algorithm, or through an outsourced vendor.

Some health IT systems come with robust analytics capabilities and the necessary algorithms to efficiently identify potential duplicate data. However, an external data analysis by a vendor with a powerful record matching algorithm offers the benefit of not only identifying significantly more true duplicates, but also provides reports that help the organization understand other data integrity issues in their MPI. The challenge for many healthcare organizations is that they lack the necessary staff needed to manage, review, validate and correct duplicates. And most will not have the duplicate record management workflow queuing functionality needed to streamline the review processes.

An outsourced service provider can fill the gaps. They offer the expertise to first clean historical data, provide advanced workflow software to validate and reconcile potential duplicates. Leveraging such advances as cloud technology, SaaS and improved interfaces, they can also provide ongoing monitoring to ensure the MPI stays clean.

## DELIVERING MULTIPLE BENEFITS

In fact, ongoing monitoring is the real value of outsourced MPI management. It can be done as frequently as a hospital needs and allows any new issues to be identified and eradicated before they affect data integrity. It also frees internal HIM staff to handle higher priority areas of patient safety and data management.

Outsourcing provides access to specialized expertise, particularly for reconciliation and validation, and to advanced data analytics, when needed. This is beneficial for three reasons. It:

- Allows for deployment of the assembly line approach, which results in faster, more efficient and accurate validation and reconciliation
- Increases accuracy through quality assurance tools that are built into MPI record workflow software
- Eliminates the need to train current staff in these areas
- Provides seven-days-per-week coverage

Further, outsourced MPI management teams can provide detailed, actionable data integrity reports that pinpoint weaknesses in the system or individuals who require additional training, thus mitigating the risk of future problems.

The resultant improvements to the MPI with outsourcing can also help hospitals comply with multiple mandates. For example, a clean MPI can accelerate the hospital's ability to achieve Meaningful Use by ensuring that data percentages of unique patients are not artificially inflated due to duplicate records in the system.

It can also improve the revenue cycle by ensuring clean and accurate data is used for all billings and claims. Patient satisfaction is increased by eliminating the need for duplicate tests, while physician satisfaction improves by ensuring they have access to accurate and complete patient information when they need it. This, in turn, enhances clinician adoption and satisfaction with clinical information systems as a whole.

Finally, a clean MPI streamlines and accelerates multiple workflows, including clinical and registration. This also increases patient and physician satisfaction and reduces costs.

## A RELATIONSHIP WORTH EXPLORING

Effective management of MPI is a crucial component of any hospital's data integrity strategy. It ensures that patient information is clean and accurate. This, in turn, reduces costs, enhances safety, impacts quality outcomes and improves compliance.

Given its financial and clinical benefits, it makes sense that outsourcing MPI management is emerging as a solid strategy for achieving the highest level of data integrity. It offers a cost-effective and highly effi-

cient way to ensure all patient data is clean, accurate and immediately available when needed for clinical decision-making.

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