



Outsourcing MPI Management to Reduce Costs and Improve Data Integrity

WHITE PAPER

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Outsourcing MPI Management to Reduce Costs and Improve Data Integrity

Effectively managing the master patient index (MPI) is an important element of any hospital's data integrity strategy. It ensures that the patient information used in nearly every aspect of care and administration is clean and accurate, which mitigates the risk of treatment delays or inappropriate care decisions made based on inaccurate and/or incomplete information.

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

Elevating the importance of effective MPI management are the emergence of new healthcare 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 in the push for more efficient MPI management is its impact on a hospital's ability to achieve meaningful use to secure incentive funds under the Health Information Technology for Economic and Clinical Health (HITECH) Act. In particular, eliminating duplicates from the MPI allows for a more accurate count of unique patients to which certain criteria must be applied. This is why the American Health Information Management Association (AHIMA) recommends that organizations develop standard definitions for MPI data elements (e.g., a data dictionary), standards for capturing and recording patient demographic data (i.e., naming conventions), and performance standards that hold staff accountable for its accuracy.ⁱ

MPI Management Challenges

The challenge facing these healthcare initiatives, hospitals and other provider organizations in managing their MPI is finding an effective and efficient way of doing so, while eliminating existing issues and reducing the likelihood of future ones developing. In particular, dedicating sufficient resources to the ongoing management of the MPI and all associated processes is difficult.

Because most current MPI management processes are largely manual — with many healthcare organizations using rudimentary reports as their primary tool for identifying duplicates and spreadsheets for tracking them — they are prone to human error. The process itself is time consuming and labor intensive, requiring dedicated resources and special expertise that few hospitals can retain.

Limited resources prevent many hospitals from employing a more efficient technology-enabled assembly-line approach to validating and reconciling possible duplicates, which leverages individual strengths throughout the process and enables the simultaneous viewing of hundreds of pairs of potential duplicates for more rapid reconciliation. Instead, they must rely on the more error-prone and inefficient strategy of having one person, who may or may not have specific training, handling the

process from start to finish, one record at a time. Quite often, staff members assigned to correct duplicates have other assigned duties.

Exacerbating the challenges are declining reimbursements and tightening budgets, which make it increasingly difficult for hospitals to maintain sufficient staff levels dedicated to fully and effectively managing 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 activities necessitate integration of MPIs into that of the acquiring hospital. 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.

Outsourcing MPI

As MPI management takes on new prominence in today's increasingly electronic healthcare environment, the idea of outsourcing is taking hold due to its ability to address a plethora of issues impacting data integrity. The impact an MPI has on everything from meaningful use compliance to healthcare costs to safety and quality is driving more hospitals and healthcare organizations to look for outside assistance in managing their MPIs.

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.ⁱⁱ

For example, medical transcription has long been outsourced as one way to address ongoing workforce shortages. It is also an effective cost-control strategy, enabling healthcare organizations to redirect scarce staff resources to more core responsibilities.ⁱⁱⁱ

Most institutions pay, on average, 28 percent to 36 percent more for in-house transcription than they would for the same service if it were outsourced. Further, studies show that a production-based transcriptionist working from home costs nearly 37 percent less per character than an in-house transcriptionist, despite productivity levels that are around 39 percent higher than onsite transcriptionists'. A two-year study also found that hospitals could save as much as 33 percent to 38 percent a year by using outsourced transcription services.^{iv}

Release of information (ROI) is another function that is frequently outsourced, in part to save costs but also to reduce the provider's liability should information be improperly released.

ROI is a complex process with provisions that protect a patient's confidential medical record. The ROI outsourcing industry was founded more than 34 years ago to help ensure that patients, attorneys and other authorized requestors could receive medical records in a timely and confidential manner. Some hospitals give ROI responsibilities to their internal HIM staff, while others tap external resources to manage the ROI process, which includes obtaining patient consent, certifying medical records and determining what information can be released.^v

In fact, an estimated 80 percent 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.^{vi,vii}

Coding has also been a popular area for outsourcing arrangements, particularly in light of the ongoing coder shortage that makes it difficult for hospitals to recruit and retain sufficiently qualified staff to manage its coding 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.

Clearly, having an outsourcing arrangement increases productivity, efficiency and accuracy. Outsourcing MPI management will not only deliver results similar to those of ROI, transcription and coding, but it will also put hospitals in a better position to maximize the impact of their IT initiatives, including adoption of EHRs, at multiple clinical and operational levels.

As an initial step, best practice calls for analyzing the entire MPI database to identify potential duplicates — a step that can be done either with existing EHR/enterprise MPI systems (depending on the sophistication of its 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 not only 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 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, providing advanced workflow software to validate and reconcile potential duplicates. They also provide ongoing monitoring to identify any new data integrity issues, including duplicate records, before they impact care.

Multiple Benefits

In fact, the real value of outsourced MPI management is that ongoing monitoring, which can be done as frequently as a hospital needs (e.g., daily, weekly, monthly). It allows new issues to be identified and eradicated before they affect data integrity and, more importantly, patient safety. This also frees internal HIM staff to handle the higher priority areas of patient safety and data management.

Outsourcing also provides access to specialized expertise, particularly for reconciliation and validation, and to advanced data analytics, when needed. This is beneficial for two reasons. First, it allows for an assembly-line approach, wherein each step is undertaken by an individual with specific experience in that area. With the use of MPI record workflow software, built-in quality assurance (QA) increases the accuracy of this process. The end result is faster, more efficient and accurate validation and reconciliation.

Second, it eliminates the need to train current staff in these areas. Outsourced MPI management teams can provide hospitals with detailed, actionable data-integrity reports that pinpoint weaknesses in the system or individuals who require additional training, thus mitigating the risk of future problems.

This can also help hospitals comply with multiple mandates. For example, it 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.

Outsourcing MPI management can also improve the revenue cycle by ensuring clean and accurate data is used for all billings and claims and can boost patient satisfaction by eliminating the need for duplicate tests. Physician satisfaction is also impacted by ensuring that physicians have access to accurate and complete patient information when they need it, which 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.

Effective MPI management 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 patient safety, impacts quality outcomes and improves compliance.

It makes sense that, given its financial and clinical benefits, outsourcing MPI management is emerging as a solid strategy for achieving the highest level of data integrity. It offers a cost-effective and highly efficient way to ensure all patient data is clean, accurate and immediately available when needed for clinical decision-making.

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