

Vail Valley Medical Center Vail, Colorado

- 58 inpatient beds
- Very high outpatient volume
- Orthopedic specialty

The Situation

- The facility is located in a resort area with an extremely high cost of living. Coder recruitment was very difficult, with negative impact on both Discharged-Not-Final-Billed (DNFB) and Accounts Receivable (A/R). This problem was compounded by extended transcription turnaround times.

The Solution

- Outsource both coding and transcription to a single industry leader -- MedQuist.

The Result

- DNFB due to coding-related issues was reduced by 48 percent
- Transcription turnaround reduced to less than 24 hours
- Easy access to highly qualified, experienced coders
- On-demand coverage for backlogs and seasonal spikes

The Benefits

- Shared risk/reward with MedQuist
- Increased productivity and job satisfaction
- Less management time needed for staffing issues
- Rapid implementation of total outsourced solution

▶ CASE STUDY: Vail Valley Medical Center Solves Coding and Transcription Issues through Complete Outsourcing

Vail Valley Medical Center (VVMC) was facing a common problem: the shortage and turnover rate of qualified clinical coders. The organization also had a major issue with transcription turnaround times. Without the prompt transcription turnaround of key documents, such as discharge summaries, operative reports and histories, the coding process suffered even more.

To complicate matters, Vail Valley Medical Center, which has a worldwide reputation as an orthopedic center, is located in a popular resort area, and experiences dramatic census spikes during the winter and summer months. They also treat patients from around the world, creating a huge outpatient volume throughout the year. Even if VVMC could recruit quality transcriptionists and coders, there was really no downtime to catch up.

VVMC also has to submit claims and manage accounts receivable for patients from every state, as well as from foreign countries. Complicated billing processes and multiple reimbursement delays abounded.

The high cost of living, seasonal spikes, exploding outpatient volumes and complex billing issues combined to create a revenue cycle at Vail that was unique. And unique challenges require a unique approach – a complete coding and transcription outsourcing model from an experienced, world-class service organization, MedQuist.

The Road Less Traveled: Complete Outsourcing

When the Director of Health Information Management and Medical Records, Jeffery Cole, arrived at VVMC in 2006, there were definitely areas for improvement. DNFB was unacceptably high and transcription turnaround times were measured in weeks, instead of hours. VVMC had tried all the usual paths: recruitment campaigns, incentives, in-house education, and even remote coding. Completely outsourcing both coding and transcription was the next viable option. So Vail undertook a bidding process with several external companies.

Initially, Vail's strategic plan was based on a serial implementation with transcription first, followed by coding. VVMC was concerned this process would take too long, and wanted positive results much sooner. The implementation of a complete electronic health record system was also already underway. So they consolidated their approach to a parallel strategy with multiple, simultaneous implementations. This decision changed the selection criteria, and an in-depth due diligence of the competing bidders was requested.

MedQuist outsourcing services solved our productivity problems and recruiting issues.

Director, HIM and Medical Records

Selection Criteria:

Vail's first priority was a proven technology. They wanted a partner with proven, demonstrable technology already in place for coding and transcription, and a company with established relationships with Vail's other in-house vendors and electronic health record.

Quality, experienced staff, ready to go. Some vendors said they would "staff up" if and when Vail chose them, but with an accelerated schedule, this was not acceptable.

A proven track record of success. This was not the time to partner with a start-up, or even a well-known, yet inexperienced, vendor. MedQuist was the clear winner in all three categories. Cole had worked extensively with MedQuist and other vendors, and had previously selected MedQuist for both transcription and coding services. Cole says, "Both services need each other; they are linked. It makes sense to put them under the same umbrella – it eliminates finger-pointing, and the company works harder internally to resolve any unexpected issues."

Expedited Implementation

"When you are in a situation where you have to get it done, and get it done fast -- MedQuist could," Cole comments. Vail's in-house electronic health record was not "live" yet, but he was willing to implement an interim solution to solve his major problems as soon as possible. MedQuist implemented both transcription and coding in less than 45 days, and created a good basis for a healthy, long-term partnership.

Bottom-Line Results...and Advice

Vail saw a verifiable drop in DNFB due to coding of 48 percent within four months. There was also a major improvement in transcription turnaround times virtually overnight – with MedQuist outsourcing services, 24 hours is the maximum turnaround time. Some documents are dictated, transcribed and posted to the patient's medical record all within the same shift.

"In many ways, outsourcing is no different than using your own staff, but without all of the management headaches. We still track, monitor, and control the process, and assume responsibility for quality results," notes Cole.

To other HIM directors, Cole's advice is, "Why be nervous about complete outsourcing? You get better access to quality people, rules, training, and a world-class partner in MedQuist. Even if you do it in-house, majority of the time the coders are offsite – so there is really no difference with outsourcing."



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