

Chart Links Improves Workflow

By Karen Deeter

Like many organizations, Columbus Speech & Hearing Center, in Columbus, OH, approached a crossroads with its information systems strategy at the turn of the millennium. Y2K-compliance concerns about our existing patient charting solution, coupled with the need for increased functionality, forced us to either upgrade our existing application or purchase an alternative. We needed a solution that could address the specific needs of a speech and hearing clinic.

For several years our organization used a generic physician practice charting system that was not specific to rehabilitation. For instance, it could not accommodate recurring appointments, which is quite common in rehab settings.

Columbus Speech & Hearing Center

serves nearly 10,000 people annually. The center provides audiology and hearing aid services, speech-language pathology, occupational therapy, a Comprehensive Program for the Deaf, and job placement for adults with disabilities, including those who are deaf, hard of hearing, and deaf-blind.

The center collaborates with numerous other agencies and community organizations in a full-time program of education, testing, evaluation, therapy and vocational counseling on site, throughout Central Ohio, and across the state.

We decided to implement the Chart Links system, by Chart Links, in New Haven, CT, to help the workflow of our organization, such as automating referrals and insurance authorizations and accommodating cross-discipline scheduling. Its ability to automatically generate charge slips helped us to eliminate the problem of incomplete charge slips.

Other capabilities include scheduling patient appointments, managing patient charts, processing charges, creating treatment documentation, and retrieving past records.

Once you input a patient's name and birth date, Chart Links populates forms throughout the system so clinicians do not have to re-enter the information multiple times. That is one of the things our staff liked most about the system. In the past, we had 10 different forms, and each had a different spelling of the patient's name. Chart Links put a stop to that problem.

Another feature that greatly benefits the center is the automatic generation of charge slips upon user log-in. Previously, charge slips were assigned manually for appointments, and the billing office spent a substantial amount of time locating missing slips or tracking down clinicians to finish incomplete ones.

Before we began using Chart Links, completing and filing clinical documentation were challenging. Every patient encounter needs to be documented with a progress note, but progress notes often got lost, were illegible, or were not completed in a timely fashion. Using Chart Links, clinicians are able to complete progress notes easily within the system. Business managers also can use the system to monitor the status of progress notes before backlogs get out of control.

Evaluation and treatment documents used to be handwritten by clinicians and sent to word processors to type. This manual process, which took two to three weeks to complete, included typing the notes, clarifying illegible or unclear notes, and incorporating one or two revisions before the document was finalized.

Clinicians now can enter their notes directly into the system, and business managers can track the status of the process. A department director can go into the system and see who hasn't done evaluation or treatment reports, which helps avoid backlogs.

Chart Links also is a primary data entry tool for capturing billing information. Interfacing it with our medical billing system has allowed for a seamless exchange of information. The patient information entered into Chart Links is used to generate billings.

Chart Links has substantially reduced the hassles of tracking and filing paper-based documents. We now are entering electronic audio files into the system, and we're able to scan in historical patient records for patients we see on an ongoing basis. Overall, Chart Links has helped us improve our workflow and reduce administrative tasks.

Because Chart Links supports both large, multi-facility rehabilitation hospitals and small, stand-alone clinics, we know the system can accommodate the future growth of our organization.

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