

The background of the slide is a high-angle photograph of a modern hospital atrium. The space is bright and open, with large glass windows and doors. Several groups of people are visible: medical staff in blue scrubs, a doctor in a white coat, and a man in a business suit. The floor is made of light-colored stone tiles, and the overall atmosphere is professional and clean.

Three Pillars of Success in Healthcare Revenue Cycle Management

PEOPLE, PROCESSES, AND TECHNOLOGY

Effective revenue cycle management (RCM) is paramount in the healthcare industry, serving as the backbone of financial health and operational efficiency for healthcare providers.

At its core, RCM encompasses the entire lifecycle of patient care, from appointment scheduling to the final payment of a balance. This makes it a critical component in sustaining the delivery of quality healthcare services. The importance of RCM cannot be overstated, as it directly impacts a healthcare organization's ability to generate revenue, manage costs, and ultimately provide care to patients.

Success in RCM doesn't come down to one factor alone. It requires the support of three pillars — people, processes, and technologies — to navigate successfully. In this insight, we explore how skilled people, efficient processes, and emerging technologies can unlock revenue cycle success.



People: The Heart of Healthcare RCM

People, including trained professionals and dedicated staff, are the cornerstone of effective RCM. Their knowledge, experience, and commitment help ensure that each step of the revenue cycle is managed with precision and care, from accurate coding and billing to diligent follow-up on unpaid claims.

Human capital — the collective skills, knowledge, and attributes of individuals that contribute to organizational performance — is undeniably the most valuable asset in healthcare. It is the healthcare professionals who provide care, manage patient experiences, innovate medical practices, and drive operational efficiencies. Despite this, investment in human capital — through continuous professional development, supportive work environments, and recognition of staff contributions — often comes as an afterthought to investments in technology and infrastructure.

This oversight not only undermines the potential of healthcare organizations to excel in their mission, but also impacts the morale and retention of healthcare professionals. The consequences of not prioritizing human capital are far-reaching, affecting patient outcomes, operational efficiency, and the overall health of communities served.

As the healthcare sector navigates an increasingly complex landscape, it is essential to focus on its people. By doing so, healthcare organizations can unlock greater levels of innovation, efficiency, and patient satisfaction, ultimately fostering a healthier future for all. Recognizing the importance of human capital isn't a new phenomenon, but organizations should take care to ensure it doesn't fall by the wayside in the face of advances in technology.



GENERATIONAL DIVERSITY

Generational diversity in the workplace brings together a rich tapestry of perspectives, work ethics, and experiences that, when harnessed effectively, can significantly enhance organizational performance and innovation. Understanding the unique characteristics of the individuals who make up each generation in the workforce — Baby Boomers, Gen X, Millennials, and Gen Z — is essential for fostering a collaborative and productive work environment. Each of these generational cohorts brings its own set of values, communication styles, and motivational drivers, shaped by the socio-economic conditions of their formative years.



Baby Boomers

Baby Boomers, known for their strong work ethic and loyalty, value stability and are often motivated by positions of influence and opportunities to pass on their knowledge.



Gen X

Gen X, having grown up in the transition to the digital age, value independence and are adept at problem-solving, seeking flexibility and efficiency in their work.



Millennials

Millennials, the first digital natives, prioritize meaningful work and a positive work-life balance, valuing feedback and opportunities for growth.



Gen Z

Gen Z, the newest entrants to the workforce, are true digital natives who value authenticity, diversity, and innovation, with a strong entrepreneurial spirit.

Leaders must adapt their management styles to meet the varied expectations and motivations of their team members across these generational divides. This involves creating a culture of open communication, where different viewpoints are valued and leveraged to drive innovation. It also means providing tailored opportunities for professional development that resonate with the diverse aspirations of each generation. Additionally, leaders should employ flexible management practices that accommodate differing work preferences, from remote work options that may appeal to younger generations to traditional roles of mentorship and leadership that may resonate more with Baby Boomers and Gen X.

By embracing generational diversity and adapting leadership strategies accordingly, organizations can create a dynamic and inclusive workplace where every employee feels valued and motivated. Taking a multi-faceted approach, rather than "one-size-fits-all," can not only enhance employee satisfaction and retention, but also help position organizations to better meet the challenges and opportunities of the modern business landscape.

Processes: The Framework for Efficiency

Efficient and streamlined processes are essential for the smooth operation of revenue cycle management (RCM), ensuring that every step from patient intake to final billing is conducted with precision and minimal waste. When combined with a leadership style that places people at the core and strategic investments in technology, effective RCM streamlines the entire lifecycle of patient care.

THE RIGHT TEAM: THE FIRST STEP TO EFFECTIVE PROCESSES

Before delving into the intricacies of RCM processes, it's essential to recognize that the effectiveness of any process may be inherently tied to the capabilities and cohesion of the team behind it. A well-structured team, composed of individuals with diverse skills and a shared commitment to excellence, is the bedrock upon which effective processes are built. Assembling a team that embodies a culture of collaboration and mutual respect requires careful consideration of each member's strengths and how these can be leveraged to achieve the organization's goals.

At the heart of a cohesive team is trust — both in each other and in their leaders. Trust is the glue that binds the team, enabling open communication, fostering a safe environment for innovation, and encouraging the sharing of ideas without fear of judgment. When team members trust their leaders and each other, they are more likely to take ownership of their roles and contribute proactively to developing and refining processes. Leaders play a crucial role in cultivating this trust by being transparent, approachable, and consistent in their actions and decisions. They must also demonstrate an unwavering commitment to the team's success, showing that they value each member's contributions and are invested in their professional growth.

THE INTERPLAY BETWEEN TRUST AND PROCESS EFFICIENCY

Trust accelerates the decision-making process, reduces friction during process implementation, and enhances adaptability to change. In an environment where trust prevails, team members are more inclined to report issues openly, leading to quicker resolutions and continuous process improvement. Moreover, trust fosters a culture of accountability, where each member feels responsible for the success of the process and, by extension, the organization.

While the technical aspects of RCM processes are important, they cannot reach their full potential without a team built on a foundation of trust, with a clear understanding of its collective goals and the support of committed leaders. As healthcare organizations strive to navigate the complexities of RCM, remembering the human element — focusing on building and nurturing the right team — will be key to unlocking efficiency, innovation, and, ultimately, success.



ROADBLOCKS TO PROCESS IMPROVEMENT

Healthcare organizations should be vigilant of common roadblocks that can complicate efforts to refine RCM processes, including:



Reluctance to Offer Feedback: Team members may be reluctant to offer feedback on processes for fear of retaliation. Leaders must actively work to dispel fears by reassuring employees that their contributions are essential for the growth and improvement of the organization, and that their jobs are not at risk for identifying areas of improvement.



Resistance to Change: Resistance to change can slow progress in the workplace, especially when it comes to altering established processes. It is important to manage change effectively by communicating the benefits clearly and providing the necessary training and support to ease the transition.



Ignoring Data: Data-driven decision-making is key to identifying process inefficiencies and measuring the success of implemented changes. Ignoring data can result in missed opportunities for optimization and can lead to decisions based on assumptions rather than facts.



Inadequate Training: Implementing new processes without proper training can lead to errors and frustration. Comprehensive training programs are essential to help ensure that team members are competent and confident in their roles within the new processes.



Lack of Clear Objectives: Without clear objectives, process improvement efforts can become unfocused and inefficient. Setting specific, measurable goals and key performance indicators ensures that all team members are aligned and working towards the same outcomes. Tracking progress and achieving goals provides motivation for teams and allows leaders to demonstrate the value of these processes to the rest of the business.



Insufficient Resources: Process improvements often require investments in technology, personnel, or other resources. Failing to allocate the necessary resources can hinder the effectiveness of new processes and lead to burnout among team members.

By being aware of these pitfalls and actively working to create a culture of trust and open communication, healthcare organizations can significantly enhance their RCM processes. This not only leads to better financial outcomes but also contributes to a more engaged and empowered workforce.



Technology: The Path to Innovation

Technology has the potential to transform the healthcare sector, and industry leaders are taking note — in fact, according to [BDO's 2024 Healthcare CFO Outlook Survey](#), 98% of healthcare organizations are already piloting generative AI programs. However, historically, healthcare has been slow to adopt new technologies, with revenue cycle management (RCM) in particular experiencing a lag in technology adoption. To unlock full value from the revenue cycle, healthcare leaders need to combine emerging technologies with a strong people-first culture and robust processes.

HEALTHCARE'S TECH LAG

Despite the potential for technology to transform RCM processes, the healthcare industry has been notably slow in adopting these innovations, particularly in the administrative realm. This reluctance is largely due to the complex regulatory requirements unique to the healthcare sector, which often make the integration of new technologies difficult. However, the need for improved efficiency and accuracy in billing and claims processing, patient registration, and payment systems is driving a gradual shift towards embracing technological solutions.

CHALLENGES IN RCM TECHNOLOGY IMPLEMENTATION

One of the primary challenges in implementing RCM technology is the lack of interoperability between different systems and platforms. This can lead to significant gaps in communication between payers and providers, resulting in administrative errors, incorrect denials, and delays in reimbursement. Additionally, the healthcare industry's stringent data privacy and security requirements further complicate the adoption of new technologies, requiring solutions that not only enhance operational efficiency but also ensure the protection of sensitive patient information.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT THROUGH RCM TECHNOLOGY

Improvements in RCM technology require investment, but the potential savings down the line could have a profound impact on the healthcare industry. Innovations such as automated billing and claims processing systems, advanced analytics for revenue forecasting, and electronic health records (EHRs) that integrate seamlessly with billing software can significantly reduce administrative burdens and improve the accuracy of financial transactions. Moreover, the adoption of cloud-based platforms can offer enhanced data security, scalability, and accessibility, facilitating more efficient and flexible RCM processes while safeguarding patient privacy.

To fully realize the benefits of RCM technology, industry-wide collaboration and a willingness to embrace innovation are essential. Healthcare providers, payers, and technology developers must work together to overcome barriers to adoption, develop interoperable solutions, and foster an environment that supports continuous improvement and adaptation while keeping patient safety at the heart of every decision-making process.

Conclusion

People, processes, and technology represent the three pillars that form the foundation of an effective RCM strategy, each playing a crucial role in improving the financial health and operational efficiency of healthcare providers. To unlock the full value that RCM can provide, healthcare leaders must create a balanced strategy for investing in all three areas, allowing for continuous improvement and adaptation to the evolving challenges healthcare will continue to face.

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Rachel Verville, Managing Director in BDO's Healthcare Advisory Practice and leader of BDO's Revenue Cycle Practice, is an accomplished senior healthcare executive with over 30 years of experience in healthcare operations, revenue cycle services, reimbursement, policy, financial management, and technology. Her approach to revenue cycle management seeks to integrate clinical and financial operations by harmonizing people, processes, and technology. Prior to joining BDO, Rachel served in a variety of leadership positions at providers nationwide, including as Chief Revenue Officer at Allegheny Health Network.

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