

St. Francis Hospital Fast Tracks Front-End Collections with Automated Patient Pricing



Recondo SurePayHealth Drives 37 Percent Increase in Collections

Introduction

Since 1950, St. Francis Hospital has been one of Georgia's premiere places of care. Originally a small community hospital, today St. Francis is a 376-bed regional health system with dedicated centers for women's health and psychiatric care, the area's only open heart surgery program, and numerous physician practices, staffed by 2,800 full-time associates and more than 300 physicians. Its growth is a testament to the outstanding and compassionate care patients have received over many decades. Yet further investments will increasingly depend on how well St. Francis weathers the significant cutbacks to insurance payments most hospitals are experiencing, particularly the sharp decline in Medicare reimbursements.

A healthy patient collections rate can add some much needed balance to these pressures on the hospital's revenue. Accordingly, about five years ago the hospital's Patient Access department implemented a number of processes to meet new targets for collections on the front-end, which included customer service training for communicating with patients their financial responsibilities for services upfront. As a result, the hospital doubled what they collected at the point of service from the previous year. The next year, even more aggressive targets were met.

By the third year, however, St. Francis's Patient Access Services Director Linda Glass knew her staff had reached the limits of what they could collect based on manually created patient estimations. St. Francis needed an automated method to replace patient estimation processes that were no longer effective in the modern landscape of shrinking payer reimbursement and increased patient financial obligation. By adopting Recondo Technology's

AT A GLANCE

- Product used:  **SurePayHealth**
- 376-bed regional health system
- 2,800 full-time associates
- 300+ physicians
- Dedicated centers for women's health and psychiatric care
- Region's only open heart surgery program

SurePayHealth™ automated patient pricing estimation, St. Francis has increased collections by another 37 percent, while equipping staff with the tools they need to continuously improve.

Manual price estimation impedes point-of-service and pre-registration collections

Providing patients with an accurate, easy-to-understand estimation of their financial responsibility well in advance of surgery or other scheduled procedures is key to collecting more payments at the point-of-service or at pre-registration. Otherwise, said Glass, patients with high deductibles are in for an unwelcome surprise.

"It takes time to prepare an estimate when you're doing it manually," explained Glass.

Like most hospitals, St. Francis deals with multiple government and commercial payers, all with different contracted rates. St. Francis tracked this information in a number of different spreadsheets, which it wanted to



replace with a “real time” vehicle. Without the most current information, hospitals are at risk of overcharging patients, an event Glass and her team obviously wanted to avoid as much as possible. “Nothing is worse than hearing you asked people for too much money,” Glass noted.

Finally, there was the challenge of training staff to ask for payment at pre-service and point-of-service. This would require a changed mindset from staff and patients alike; however, it would ultimately foster more conversations with patients about different payment plan options, which would result in fewer patients canceling important care.

THE SOLUTION

Automated, real-time patient pricing estimation

St. Francis faced numerous barriers to increasing its point-of-service collections, yet the change from manual estimate creation to Recondo Technology’s automated price estimation tool SurePayHealth™ has hurdled them all.

How it works

SurePayHealth generates an accurate statement of each patient’s financial responsibility throughout all points of access. Because this information is culled directly from payer websites, patients are given pricing estimates based on their most current year-to-date benefits accumulators. This greatly reduces the risk of incorrectly calculating what the patient owes, which along with the new speed in determining the patient’s portion, gives registration staff the information they need to present estimates the same day surgery is scheduled. Additionally, SurePayHealth calculates accurate discounts for self-pay patients, another helpful tool for front-end staff.

Deploys as a single solution or part of a comprehensive automation suite

As Patient Access departments replace an array of manual processes with automation, there is a need for “integrated patient access”—that is, seamlessly integrated patient access solutions from one vendor instead of multiple and piecemeal tools. SurePayHealth works in concert with EligibilityPlus and Auth-DP, Recondo’s automated benefits eligibility and authorization verification solutions; both of which St. Francis also use.

Advice on Automation from a Patient Access Services Director

Once St. Francis made the decision to replace manual processes for patient price estimation with automation, the next step was to find the right solution vendor.

“The first part of this process involved reaching out to vendors that I’d heard good things about. Then I put together a team of everyone who would use or have a stake in the new automated patient pricing tool,” recalled Linda Glass, Patient Access Services Director at St. Francis Hospital.

She continued, “This included associates with oversight of the charge master and contracting, hospital and practice business office staff, and case management and medical records team members. Then we brought in one company every afternoon to present a solution.”

Although members of the task force had different departmental needs and questions, the entire team unanimously chose Recondo Technology. “Recondo was able to answer almost every question at the meeting. There was very little the sales rep didn’t know, and what he didn’t, he found out quickly and let us know,” Glass said.

Since then, customer service from Recondo has been a similar experience. “The same people have serviced us since day one. They know our hospital, our needs, how we use SurePayHealth. When issues do arise, they are quickly settled, rather than having to explain things all over again to someone new,” described Glass.

Training her people on SurePayHealth has been a “breeze” Glass said. What has taken more time is encouraging staff to think in terms of point-of-service collections and following collections scripting with patients while giving outstanding customer service. Training is an ongoing process, but now staff are equipped with the right tools.

Results

By all measures, automated patient price estimation has made the defining difference in improving pre-service and point-of-service collections at St. Francis Hospital.

- Increased monthly point of service collections from 2012 to 2014 by 37 percent
- Surpassed 2014 collection goal of \$3.2 million, reaching \$3.8 million
- Increased patient satisfaction with faster and more accurate patient estimates
- Can begin the estimation process before the patient appointment concludes

Glass believes all hospitals will eventually need automation to achieve such improvements on the front end of collections. "It is extremely hard to ask people to do a certain job without the tools to accomplish it. Manually, our team could only go so far in increasing pre-registration and point-of-service collections, which are critical collections points today for any facility," she observed.

Recondo's SurePayHealth gives her staff the accurate information they need, which in turn makes conversations with patients about their financial obligation easier. General productivity has increased, too. "Before Recondo, our staff would sometimes have to sit on the phone forever with the insurance companies, who would only discuss three or four patients at a time. So the next day, the round of calls started over again. Now it's all automated, so all of that time is free for other work," concluded Glass.

Next steps

St. Francis has experienced such positive results with automated patient pricing, the hospital plans a broader expansion of the solution into additional physician practices that use different HIS systems. St. Francis is also going to deploy Recondo's automated eligibility verification at its psychiatric hospital, an area of care which has its own unique challenges in addition to those that are profession-wide. As St. Francis has proven with Recondo's automated technology, one of the most important tools of all to stay ahead of these pressures is having the right answers.

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Ready to see what Recondo can do for your organization?

Contact us today at 888-732-6672 or info@recondotech.com

Recondo Corporate Headquarters
8300 E. Maplewood Ave, Suite 310
Greenwood Village, Colorado 80111

303.974.2800 • 888.732.6672

www.recondotech.com

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