

Case Study

ST. JOSEPH HOSPITAL

Organization

Acute-care non-profit community hospital, Bangor, Maine, 112 beds and 850 employees

Challenge

Respond to growing number of requests for inpatient and outpatient estimates

Solution

Ready access to relevant hospital pricing and billing data

Results

Significantly improved estimate timeliness and accuracy, upfront collections, patient satisfaction and staff productivity

Craneware makes it easy for St. Joseph to give accurate price estimates quickly.

"Patient Charge Estimator™ enables staff to efficiently provide patients with complete accurate price estimates."

Cumbersome Price Quoting Process

For more than eight years, St. Joseph Reimbursement Charge Supervisor, Lisa Killam, and her staff responded to price quote requests using a number of reference resources including a spreadsheet with limited search capabilities, stacks of coding books for surgical procedure look-ups, time-consuming calls to medical records for CPT codes, and a manually-updated pricing table of the hospital's most common procedures. Sometimes during this disjointed process, the estimate information was not thoroughly recorded, leading to later discrepancies and patient complaints.

The problem was compounded by rising numbers of price quote requests: In 2001, the hospital received 42; in 2009, more than 347 and volumes continue to multiply. "When a dramatic increase in price quote requests began out-stripping our ability to handle them in a timely way, it became crucial to find a better system to provide this information," Killam stated.

Improving Patient Charge Estimating Efficiency

Having experienced great success managing and capturing patient charges accurately with Craneware's Chargemaster Toolkit®, St. Joseph again turned to Craneware for help addressing its patient estimate challenge.

After extensive evaluation, the hospital implemented Patient Charge Estimator in 2009 — and began upgrading its patient estimating service capabilities.

Patient Satisfaction Noticeably Higher

Patients, physicians and hospital reimbursement staff immediately began to benefit from the automated estimating solution. Patient Charge Estimator automatically accesses the hospital's historical claims data to create estimates based on actual high, low and mid-priced bills for a particular procedure. Patients are given the typical range of costs, adjusted for circumstances on a case-by-case basis. Improved efficiency, accuracy and thoroughness of the estimates have made a positive impact on patient satisfaction.



"Our biggest benefit from Craneware's Patient Charge Estimator is better patient satisfaction."

Lisa Killam
Reimbursement Charge Supervisor
St. Joseph Hospital

Craneware's Patient Charge Estimator empowers hospitals to quickly provide price estimates for inpatient and outpatient procedures using the hospital's own historical claims data, chargemaster files, managed care contracts, and patient-provided insurance information.

About Craneware

Craneware (AIM:CRW.L) is the leader in automated revenue integrity solutions that improve financial performance for healthcare organizations. Craneware's market-driven SaaS solutions help hospitals and other healthcare providers more effectively price, charge and code for services and supplies associated with patient care. This optimizes reimbursement, increases operational efficiency and minimizes compliance risk. By partnering with Craneware, clients achieve the visibility required to identify, address and prevent revenue leakage. To learn more, visit craneware.com.

"Patients are very good about communicating what makes them happy," Killam said, "They are happy we can give them the information they want." While staff productivity has also significantly improved, St. Joseph regards improved patient satisfaction as the most valuable benefit provided by Patient Charge Estimator.

Simplified Price Quote Processes

"Patients are price-shopping for hospital services," Killam explained. "Our ability to provide callers accurate estimates quickly, gives us an important advantage." Now, a dedicated phone number for patients, physicians and hospital staff to get their price questions answered, combined with streamlined workflow and automated access to hospital data, assure returned calls within a day. Patient Charge Estimator implementation and training in other departments, including scheduling and pre-registration, is underway. This will allow patient price quotes to be provided on a decentralized basis for even more efficient resource-use.

Upfront Collections Capabilities Improve Cash Flow

Accurate complete estimates provide clear concise financial information to meet *HFMA PATIENT FRIENDLY BILLING*® guidelines and outline payment options upfront. This helps create a positive patient experience through understanding financial expectations before service occurs. If hospitals don't set advance expectations on pricing, there is a much lower chance of collection at the time of service. St. Josephs plans to install credit card equipment at their front desk to help expedite upfront collections. This effort coupled with Patient Charge Estimator's ability to provide a quick easy accurate estimate while the patient is there waiting to pay is expected to measurably improve cash flow and reduce bad debt.

"Many self-pay and co-pay patients prefer to pay on the day of their service, and we're making that easier for them with accurate estimates," Killam said. "Now we can take care of the account right there, or immediately refer them to our payment counselors to set up payment plans — yet one more way Patient Charge Estimator meets our patients' needs."

Helping Patients Prepare for Financial Obligations

In the future, St. Joseph may use Patient Charge Estimator to better manage expectations of self-pay and emergency co-pay patients by mailing them custom price quote letters with accurate estimates. This advance notice of costs lets patients make financial arrangements before arriving for service.

Patient Charge Estimator has contract management capabilities. The software can download estimates based on provider contracts, creating specific estimates for verified insurance plans. St. Joseph's may use this capability in the future.

Clear, Concise Records Leave Reliable Audit Trail

Patient Charge Estimator has extensive search and store capabilities to support defensible, transparent pricing for regulatory compliance. Reimbursement staff, prompted to input procedure, insurance and other information, may also add notes that become part of the record. That means if months later consumers question the price, there is a complete record of the estimate quoted, and why.

"Before this software, price quotes were hard to handle," said Killam. "Now, thanks to Craneware, we provide this information easily — keeping patients happy, staff more productive, and helping to improve our hospital's financial performance."



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