

Mountain States Health Alliance Increases Occupancy Rate by Streamlining Patient Transfer Process

At a Glance

Organization

Mountain States Health Alliance,
Johnson City, Tenn.

- Facilities: five hospitals with more than 800 beds

Solution Spotlight

- CareEnhance Call Center

Critical Issues

- Inefficient transfer process
- Need to improve call center functionality
- Manual processes

Results

- Increased transfer business by centralizing processing of patient transfers
- Recognized 100% margin for new patients over an entire hospital stay, less 50% loyalty factor
- Eliminated manual processes

Profile

Comprised of five hospitals with more than 800 beds, Mountain States Health Alliance (MSHA), headquartered in Johnson City, Tenn., is a major healthcare system serving the residents of northeast Tennessee, southwest Virginia, western North Carolina and portions of Kentucky. MSHA is one of two Level 1 trauma centers in northeast Tennessee. Surrounded by many regional hospitals within a 50-mile radius, MSHA is in a prime position to use the power of technology and process improvements to increase its occupancy rate with transfers from these regional hospitals.

Challenges

MSHA needed to better respond to the communities it served and increase profitability. However, the alliance's patient transfer process was uncoordinated and challenging to manage, causing dissatisfaction among patients, physicians and regional hospitals. Each provider called different departments within MSHA to coordinate transfers, which was time-consuming for the provider and difficult to track and coordinate at MSHA. While this process is typical in healthcare today, MSHA saw an opportunity to differentiate itself in the patient referral and transfer arena, potentially increasing its share of this business.

Answers

To streamline the transfer process, MSHA looked to implement a centralized call center capable of managing all contacts and procedures involved in a patient transfer. It also sought to build key relationships with administrators and clinicians at the regional hospitals to ensure a high adoption rate for its new referral program.

MSHA chose McKesson's CareEnhance[®] Call Center, a comprehensive solution that provides the tools necessary to efficiently manage a medical contact center. The CareEnhance Call Center was integral to MSHA's "provider-to-provider" referral program called MDLink, which was housed within the call center and began with approximately five calls per day.

"When we started this program, we discussed what software package we needed to support it," explains Rick Newman, director, Medical Call Center. "McKesson's call center solutions have the flexibility to support a patient transfer call and don't require our call center staff to follow a rigid call flow."

With the CareEnhance Call Center, MSHA centralized transfer requests and significantly reduced call response time. The solution increased efficiency and made it easier for providers to transfer patients. The CareEnhance Call Center also enabled MSHA to

Case Study

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Rick Newman

Director, Medical Call Center

eliminate manual processes and receive accurate, actionable data on MDLink’s performance. “In the past our clinicians probably spent two hours per day entering information into a spreadsheet,” notes Newman. “By processing patient transfer calls in CareEnhance Call Center, we can automatically generate the report, thus eliminating the manual process and improving data quality.”

By 1999, the MDLink program grew to 2,500 calls, resulting in 850 patient transfers per year. But Newman knew that MDLink had not reached its potential. After reviewing financial goals and determining an acceptable return, MSHA’s management team determined that, with additional resources, MDLink could increase transfer business by 50% the following year.

To reach its goal, MSHA implemented a three-tier marketing approach. First, senior-level administrators with MSHA took the MDLink message on the road, meeting with administrators at the regional hospitals. Second, Newman, along with business development and MSHA physicians, met with the regional physicians to discuss program details. Finally, call center nurses met with nursing staff at regional facilities to address process logistics. The three-tiered approach was successful, gaining agreement with the regional hospitals to use MDLink for their transfer requests.

Results

With the CareEnhance Call Center solution, MSHA’s MDLink program achieved a high level of service and continuous process improvement. In 2005, the call center recorded a total of 420,000 calls through MDLink, handling more than 4,300 transfers. The program brought substantial revenue to MSHA, with 30% of transfers for the cardiology unit and another 30% for the hospitalist program. Overall, MDLink recognizes 100% margin for new patients over an entire hospital stay, less a 50% adjustment to account for the estimated number of patients that would have been admitted regardless of the MDLink program.

Measuring MDLink’s success has been important to MSHA, and the CareEnhance Call Center solution has enabled accurate financial reporting and revenue reconciliation. “For 11 years we have successfully used McKesson’s call center solutions to document, track, report, and provide the database used in our ROI and market analysis of the MDLink program,” says Newman. “This quantifiable success has given the call center and MDLink an enviable position within the organization. The program is now recognized by senior executives as a necessary and integral part of the business plan.”

McKesson Provider Technologies

5995 Windward Parkway
Alpharetta, GA 30005

<http://www.mckesson.com>
1.800.981.8601

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PRT245-08/06