



Sleep Disorders Clinic Wakes Up

Improved Workflow Processes & Coding Practices Positively Affect Bottom Line

When a local six-bed Sleep Disorders specialty practice found itself without a manager, they turned to Derry, Nolan and Associates. In addition to the desire to hire a progressive manager, leadership wanted to correct workflow inefficiencies and expand the sleep beds by two.

Crystal Nolan, a principal in the Derry, Nolan consultancy and Dee Collins, RN, stepped in as interim managers over a four-month period. While performing daily operational oversight and helping to recruit the new manager, the two performed an operational and financial assessment. Concurrently, fellow consultant Julie Titus conducted an in-depth coding analysis. After the assessments and analyses, the team recommended and helped implement several major process improvements.

The Issues

- Nolan and Collins found patient wait times needed to be shorter to help increase volume. Also, there were space limitations to adding two beds.
- Front office staff spent significant time individually calling every patient to confirm appointments, hampering daily task completion and limiting the amount of administrative help. Additionally, e-mail was underutilized and manual processes resulted in slower processes and were more prone to error.
- The Medical Assistant bore the bulk of the patient prep and room prep work in addition to supporting physicians with basic chart form completion and download of visit results. Overload caused room turnover delays.
- On the technical side, lead staff spent more than four hours scoring some sleep studies due to the quality of study data gathered and acting as educators and resources for the data-gathering technicians. Additionally, a lead technician exhibited frustration with fellow staff, feeling they did not respond appropriately to her attempts to educate.
- Titus's coding analysis findings showed the physicians were both default and under-coding, potentially leaving revenue on the table.

“Derry, Nolan & Associates performed an operational and financial assessment leading to coding opportunities, streamlining scheduling, improving workflow processes and assisting in the recruitment of a new sleep center manager. Also, the interim management they provided was exactly what we needed to help identify internal issues.”
– Mitch Weinberg, MD PhD
Vice President, Medical Affairs
Evergreen Healthcare

The Solution

Patient Schedules

- Follow-up visits decreased from 30 minutes to 20 minutes and patient consult visits from 45 to 40 minutes helped increase volume. By itself, the appointment time change resulted in **over 100 more consults per year**.
- Installed Murphy beds in two of the sleep rooms, allowing them to double as consult rooms.

Front Office

- Rather than increase staffing to support new physicians, instructed staff to lean more heavily on the internal e-mail system for communications. For example, incoming messages for physicians were



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stored in an e-mail folder in the sleep clinic file, rather than being hand-written. This also induced time savings and reduced errors.

- Recommended the use of an automated reminder call system to alleviate individual appointment reminder calls, freeing up front desk to help with more administrative duties.

Workflows

- To speed up MA's work, Derry, Nolan identified several tasks that could transition to the Front Desk, as well as process changes to allow the MA sufficient time to complete room turnover.
- Reception would do the download while the MA roomed the patient. Additionally, reception would add the previous Weight and BMI (body mass indicator) to the chart form when doing chart prep work.
- Implemented the use of automated Blood Pressure, oxygen saturation, temperature and pulse machines, instead of using a manual BP, second device for oxygen saturation and pulse, and a third for temperature.
- Recommended physicians complete dictation immediately after patient visit. This gave the MA an additional five minutes to handle download handoff and complete rooming processes, ensuring the physician gets out on time.
- To improve sleep study data quality and scoring required that the techs become more proficient in testing. It became mandatory that all techs pass their certification exams within one year to become more proficient with the studies.
- The lead tech who was frustrated with behavioral issues received mentoring on how best to deliver feedback on her perception that fellow techs did not engage in her attempts to further their knowledge.

Financial Analysis

- The internal coding audit undertaken based on results from a CMS peer review showed one physician in particular was default and under coding. Rather than base his coding on time, recommended that he base it on examination elements to reflect the study and treatment more accurately.

Derry, Nolan and Associates worked in tandem with the leadership team to place the new manager. Nolan helped ease the transition through provision of a comprehensive report to help the new manager decide how to focus her energy and best use staff resources. As the team continues its workflow improvement tasks under the guidance of the new manager, the Sleep Disorders Clinic is on the path to further its expansion goals, as well as positively affect its bottom line.