



Healthcare Excellence Institute

## Reducing HIM Cycle Times by 38%, Establishing Day of Discharge Processing

*Legendary mathematician and scientist Lord Kelvin is quoted as saying, "If you can't measure it, you can't improve it." Objectively measuring the HIM process can be problematic for many providers and is often overlooked. However, HIM performance has a very real impact on overall hospital operational success. Aside from presenting compliance risks if not properly run with respect to deficiencies, HIM departments impact the quality of clinical care by providing records in a timely fashion, help or hinder physician relations by making the deficiency process more or less pleasant, and lastly impact reimbursement through correct and timely coding. In this case study, we are highlighting a recent project completed in the HIM department of City Centre Hospital in San Antonio, TX.*

Before we begin however, allow us to take a brief moment to share our view on measuring HIM performance and the metrics we'll be using to establish cycle time results:

**Days Discharge to Abstract (Coding)**- the amount of time, measured in days, from when the patient discharges to when the medical record is abstracted or coded.

**Days Discharge to First Claim**- the amount of time, in days, from when the patient discharges to when the first claim is submitted which measures the whole process inclusive of many departments, not just HIM.

**Problem Statement:** Leadership at City Centre Hospital in San Antonio, TX recognized that their HIM department was in need of process redesign due to non-standardized procedures and high volatility of HIM cycle times. Paper stacks could be seen throughout the department and often associates would be unable to find charts in a timely manner. While some stacks were labeled to varying degrees of clarity, many were not, leading to "search missions" several times a day when a specific chart was needed.

One of the biggest issues contributing to backlogged processing was the fact that the HIM department was spread out across 2 floors and there was no co-location between assemblers, analysts, coders, perm-file associates and managers. Medical records would get shuffled back and forth from different departments, different floors and then doctors would present to address deficiencies, only to find that the record couldn't be immediately located. Complicating matters further, HIM associates were using a modified terminal digit order (TDO) that made keeping records organized cumbersome.

Leadership had set the goal that all hospitals within the region needed to be at 3 days or fewer for Discharge to Abstract Cycle Time and City Centre was just below 4. Further, when it came to physician deficiencies and incomplete records, there were minimal process controls and compliance issues, leading to unhappy physicians.

**Solution:** Leadership at City Centre partnered with the Healthcare Excellence Institute (HEI) to facilitate major process change during a series of 5 Day Kaizen Events. The goal was to redesign the process using Lean, Six Sigma, and Toyota Production System principles to reduce HIM processing times while simultaneously improving physician satisfaction.

**Implementation:** As with all HEI Kaizen Events, a multi-functional team was created and on Monday morning, the team began the week with training in Lean revenue cycle principles. The team, along with HEI's Kaizen leaders, wanted to address why their process was failing and the first step, as always, is process observation using a combination of Lean, Six Sigma, and Toyota Production System "lenses" to view the process from an outside perspective. The team agreed that by Friday morning, they wanted to be up and running with the new process and would be processing medical records on the day of receipt from the floor.

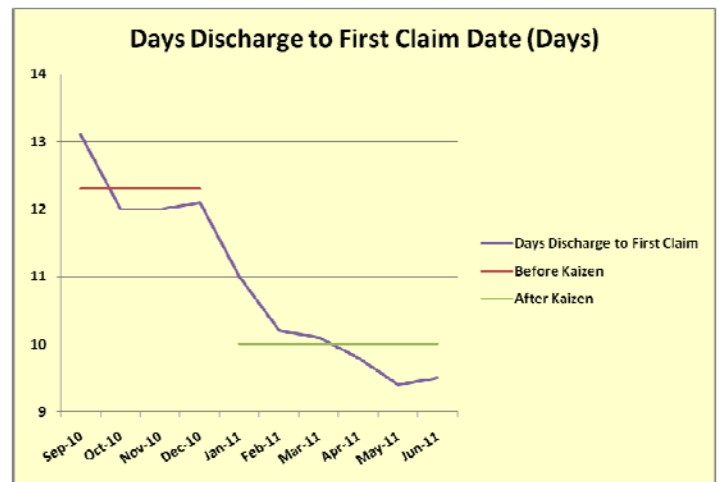
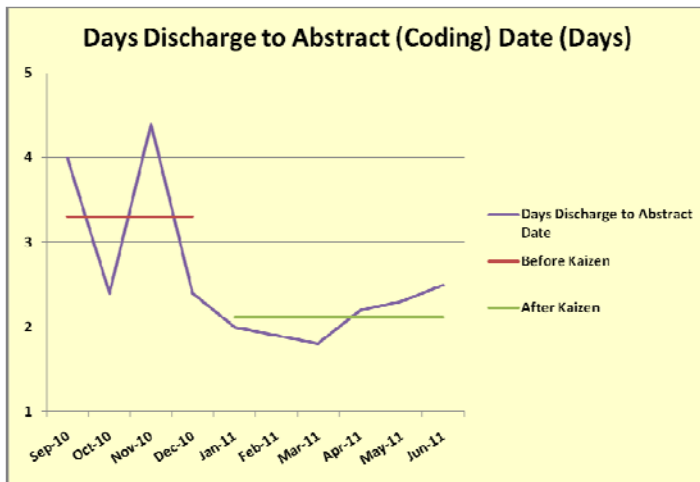
### **Results:**

By Friday afternoon, the team was able to observe and reflect on the changes that happened:

- New process designed to flow: Pickup- assembly- analysis- coding- permanent file
- New controls: cross-regional standardized TDO format, specific designated chart order, associate job aides
- New physical layout: removed cubicles, created high performance work cell, co-location between all associates and managers
- Updated, efficient physician dictation work space
- Automated chart label system
- Visual workplace cues- area labeling and daily shift briefings

- Day of discharge processing

By the following week, the new process and structure had been smoothed out to yield significant results in the metrics the team set out to improve.



**The Process Change:** The original process was extremely non-standardized. After the medical records were picked up, sometimes they were taken to assembly, and sometimes they were taken straight to coding. Some records were analyzed, some bypassed analysis. It was common for a chart to be coded prior to being analyzed for deficiencies. Medical records were picked up at random intervals throughout the day, causing periods of feast and famine for HIM workload.

The new process began with a set interval of chart pick-up based on hospital volume analysis. This meant that batches are now usually of similar size at any given point. Medical records now go through a set order within the co-located work cell: pickup, assembly, analysis, coding, then into perm file. A chart tracking system is now in place that allows associates to check-out charts. Finally, physicians now have a functional and efficient place to address deficiencies and combined with the new process, it has cut down on the time it takes for physicians to complete their charts.

**Conclusion:** By utilizing a Kaizen Event to implement rapid change, City Centre Hospital was able to reduce discharge to abstract cycle times by over 38% and achieve their cycle time goal of 3 days or fewer. They were also able to shave 2 days off the time it took them to get the first claim out the door, resulting in cash coming in the door quicker. Finally, the team now has a lean system that processes medical records to flow, a visual workplace, level work loading and begins processing medical records on day of discharge, eliminating the backlog.

**Contact Us:** Let us help your hospital solve everyday HIM issues. Contact us for more information.

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