Continual technology improvements are important to the physicians and staff at Children’s Orthopaedic and Scoliosis Surgery Associates LLC, a practice that’s maximizing the value of Centricity Practice Solution.

**Summary**

The administrator of Children’s Orthopaedic & Scoliosis Surgery Associates believe a practice can’t succeed by standing still. Replacing its practice management (PM) system with the PM Module of Centricity Practice Solution in 2003 enabled this forward-thinking St. Petersburg, Fla.-based organization to cut days in AR over 120 from 35% to 12%. Over the next several years, fueled by a mix of strategy and technology, the practice adopted Centricity EDI Services Hosted Claims Manager, upgraded to Version 10.1 of Centricity Practice Solution’s Practice Management Module to take advantage of Task Management, and added the EMR Module of Centricity Practice Solution.

These advancements have enabled the practice to:

- Receive payments 22% faster
- Improve the process for managing claims and remittance safety with EFT deposits.
- Decrease Days in A/R (DAR) by 10% – 15%
- Initiate a three-year run of zero clinical denials
- Support five doctors with the same staff level as when it supported three doctors
- Streamline task management with new best practices

Children’s Orthopaedic & Scoliosis Surgery Associates management strategy underscores the importance of taking full advantage of Centricity Practice Solution’s functionality and services.
Since its launch in 1989, Children's Orthopaedic & Scoliosis Surgery Associates, LLP has been renowned for its talent and technology. The practice's five pediatric orthopaedists rely on advanced Diagnostic Imaging systems and specialized instruments from GE Healthcare which greatly increased their efficiency and prevented bottle necks in the x-ray department. Children's Orthopaedic and Scoliosis Surgery Associates surgical demonstrations have been broadcast live to Europe. The team understands the value of cutting-edge tools that can help children and young adults.

But in October 2003, it was the practice itself that needed help.

The organization was utilizing an outdated practice management system – and it showed. More than 35% of its accounts receivable (A/R) income was 120 days or more outstanding, and the average time it took to receive payment after sending an invoice was 86.3 days. As eye-opening advancements occurred at the operating table, eye-straining headaches stemmed from internal operations.

Efficient procedures for managing claims, minimizing rejections and streamlining insurance follow-up are particularly important for Children's Orthopaedic & Scoliosis Surgery Associates, says Debra L. Mitchell, RN, BSN, MBA, the practice's administrator. As a pediatric sub-specialty practice, nearly one-third of its cases are paid through Medicaid, which has 60% lower reimbursement levels than Medicare in Florida, she says. In addition, the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) will provide healthcare to nearly 8 million children whose families make too much to qualify for Medicaid but not enough to afford private insurance. "So when it comes to commercial insurance, it's very important that we collect efficiently. We need to make sure all authorizations are in place, and that all case data is correct."

Other practices can relate. As demands in the health care industry continue to change, organizations that operate lean, maximize resources and optimize business performance are well-positioned to compete and win. Doing so requires a flexible, customizable practice management (PM) system, says Mitchell, who has served Children's Orthopaedic & Scoliosis Surgery Associates since 1999.

"Like many practices, we're not large enough to have different department heads," she says. "A small staff here in St. Petersburg and in our Tampa office handles HR, A/R, patient complaints and much more. That's why we have to be efficient and zoom in on potential problems quickly."

In 2003, Children's Orthopaedic & Scoliosis Surgery Associates chose to replace its existing practice management system with what later became known as Centricity Practice Solution's PM Module and adopt Centricity EDI in October 2008. "We needed integrated technology that could grow along with us," she says.

Centricity Practice Solution's PM module enables practices to accurately enter and confirm patient demographic and insurance billing, while the EDI solution gave office staff the ability to file claims, bill more efficiently and streamline the electronic "schedule to payment" workflow.

THE RIGHT TECHNOLOGY FOR A GROWING PRACTICE
Zero Balance Surprises Doctor

A physician at Children's Orthopaedic and Scoliosis Surgery Associates recently approached Debra L. Mitchell, RN, BSN, MBA, with a superbill in his hand – and a concerned look on his face. "I just performed surgery on this kid two weeks ago," he told the practice's administrator. "So why is there no balance here?"

Mitchell accessed the patient's record in Centricity Practice Solution and told him the good news that the EDI solutions enabled the practice to already receive payment for the surgery.

"He smiled at me, and brought me another superbill, asking the same question," Mitchell says. "That one had been paid, too. He couldn't believe everything had already gone through. Our turnaround time for billing is quick."

Mitchell says 90% of the practice's claims now go out electronically, and most of them are paid within 17 days. "There are several reasons, first utilizing the PM's Case Management solution we can track referrals and authorizations. Then with Centricity EDI Hosted Claims Manager, our claims are scrubbed allowing us to correct incomplete or incorrect claims prior to submission, helping reduce our claim denials, potential underpayments and costly re-work. This helps us send in a 'clean' claim the first time, and we get paid faster as a result."

Online Verification Helps Prevent Errors

At the time of scheduling, personnel at Children's Orthopaedic and Scoliosis Surgery Associates can verify the patient's insurance carrier and other information by sending a HIPAA 270 eligibility request through the Centricity EDI Services component of Centricity Practice Solution.

"After we take insurance info, we just hit the Verification button," Mitchell says. "If we make a mistake, it gives that person, at that very moment, an opportunity to correct it or request a re-send before the claim is even filed with the payer. We can say, 'Mrs. Smith, I just tried to verify your insurance but couldn't. Can you please give me your information again?' The result is much cleaner data. Verifying insurance immediately is one of the biggest advantages of the system — and absolutely critical to running an efficient office here. The national average for the cost to rework a claim is $25 dollars and if 15%-16% of all claims need rework, that can really add up. With Hosted Claims Manager, claims reworks can be reduced by over 50%."

Centricity Practice and Centricity EDI provide insight for improving financial performance

By August 2006, only 3.7% of the practice's insurance A/R billings were past 120 days outstanding, compared with 8.0% in August 2001. Also in August 2006, average A/R days fell to 43.7 from 86.3 in August 2001. The practice continued to improve by replacing its previous solution with Centricity EDI. By August of 2010, the practice's days in AR decreased to 35.88. Today the days in A/R is 14 and the MGM Benchmark (2011) was 37.11. These improvements occurred despite having the same billing staff throughout that span, Mitchell says, praising the value of cleaner claims.

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“My Favorite Module”: Hosted Claims Manager Helps the Practice Ensure Accuracy and Speed

Savvy practices realize the importance of having streamlined business processes, not just impressive medical procedures, so they constantly seek ways to gain efficiency, leverage data and surpass administrative standards.

One such improvement came after the practice adopted the Hosted Claims Manager feature of Centricity EDI. Since the implementation of Hosted Claims Manager in 2010, Children's Orthopaedic & Scoliosis Surgery Associates hasn't had a clinical denial due to incorrect coding, Mitchell says.

With integrated EDI transactions, Centricity Practice Solution provides a single vendor system that enhances workflow from schedule-to-payment to help reduce the time between the initial visit and the final payment.

Prior to submitting a claim to insurance electronically, Centricity EDI Services enables permitted users to review and edit claims, while also providing near real-time feedback on possible problems with those claims. “After the doctor gives a diagnosis and enters the charges, data is sent to Hosted Claims Manager, and the tool does several scrubs to make sure all the data is clean,” Mitchell says.

To ensure all claims are addressed quickly and thoroughly, any payer claim rejections that haven’t been caught by the system’s proactive editing capabilities are automatically integrated back into Centricity Practice Solution. In the event a claim is rejected, users have the ability to drill down and view the claim in detail to better understand the reason behind the rejection. This feature recently saved Mitchell’s team “several hours” when new X-ray codes were being entered incorrectly, she says.

Today, staff at Children’s Orthopaedic & Scoliosis Surgery Associates can view a snapshot of any single or batch of claims and see who the destination payer is, when the file was submitted, the status of the file and the status of the individual claims within the file. The system offers the ability to review a complete date- and time-stamped file history, making it easier for Mitchell and others to monitor claims, and eliminating the need to manually track irregularities that have been identified.

“One of the best modules Centricity has is Hosted Claims Manager — I love it,” Mitchell says, adding that clinical rejections and denials affect profitability, and take time and effort to address. “We get other kinds of denials from time to time, but never a clinical one due to incorrect coding. Centricity EDI helps make everything faster and more accurate. Also, we’ve gone from three surgeons to five surgeons with the same staff level. The only reason we’ve been able to accomplish that is with technology advances.”

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Debra L. Mitchell, RN, BSN, MBA
Administrator
Children’s Orthopaedic & Scoliosis Surgery Associates, St. Petersburg, Fla.
The Value of Upgrading: Improved Task Management, Faster Payments

Many practice administrators like Mitchell are under the gun and under the microscope. They are charged with managing costs and impressing docs, but their resources are often stretched thin. The more efficient their workflow runs, the better.

To that end, Children’s Orthopaedic & Scoliosis Surgery Associates upgraded to Version 10.1 of Centricity Practice Solution in May 2012. In doing so, the practice implemented the technology’s Task Management module.

The module enables users to identify visits that require some form of follow-up. These visits are identified by inclusion into a queue, with input criteria such as insurance balance, company, current insurance carrier and more. Tasks are assigned by Mitchell or other users at the practice, based on its unique workflow procedures. (Security can be assigned in the Task Management module to individual users or groups of users.)

One of Mitchell’s own responsibilities is insurance follow-up to expedite the payment process. To handle this, she accesses the Task Management workflow and selects “My Tasks.” She can open any “visit” (task) and complete follow-up work, such as calling the insurance carrier, changing visit information and re-filing. When she marks a task as “Complete,” it disappears from her list and appears in the Completed Tasks queue. Mitchell and her team use a column sort feature to move larger outstanding payment balances to the top, prioritizing them.

“One major advantage is that front desk personnel now can view insurance verification and scheduling information simultaneously while collecting co-payments up front. This is especially important with the rise in high-deductible health plans”.

“Back in 2003, when we first implemented Centricity we had said that the upgrade would be successful only if our revenue had absolutely no drop, and our collection results improved. Well, our revenues went up, and our insurance days in A/R dropped from 86.3 to 24. This has held true throughout the years even with upgrades in 2012. These improvements continued despite having the same number of billing staff throughout the years of using Centricity”

The Value of a Single-Vendor Solution

While many organizations view tasks such as scheduling, electronic medical records (EMR), billing and claims management as integral, Mitchell and her team also wanted those procedures to be integrated — part of a single system that could help Children’s Orthopaedic & Scoliosis Surgery Associates achieve optimal results.

That’s why in October 2011, when it came time to select an EMR, the practice chose to adopt the EMR module of Centricity Practice Solution. By integrating EMR and PM functionality, the technology helps enhance quality of care, ensure the efficiency of day-to-day operations and reduce operating costs, Mitchell says.

Mitchell says Centricity Practice Solution enables Children’s Orthopaedic & Scoliosis Surgery Associates to access near real-time information needed to make data-driven decisions. The results are improved care, better bottom-line results and use of best practices, she says.
Confidence in the Future

As more healthcare organizations address and implement the updated International Classification of Diseases codes (ICD-10), Mitchell says she “isn’t as worried as others,” despite her assertion that orthopaedics will be one of the most affected specialties for ICD-10 because of the specialty’s plethora of diagnoses.

The opportunities for advancing with ICD-10 revolve around the ability to perform retrospective analyses. The more precise language and specific codes of ICD-10 would help researchers understand more about the healthcare industry by identifying trends, waste and abuse in the healthcare market.

“Centricity Practice Solution is such a solid practice management system, and I'm confident we'll be fine [for ICD-10],” Mitchell says.

The technology is already helping many practices with tools and services they need to take advantage of Meaningful Use incentives, including quality measure performances at every required stage.

Says Mitchell: “When we chose Centricity for EMR also, we did so with the future needs of our practice in mind. GE has proven to be a valuable partner for us. I strongly believe that the reason to utilize electronic medical records is not only for Meaningful Use but also because of ICD 10. I like the way that GE Centricity is handling ICD 10. We will have a fully documented record that will reflect both ICD-9 and ICD-10 in both our EMR and practice management system. Using with Centricity Practice Management and EMR has proven to be efficient and effective.”

Quick Tips on Training and Setup

“The trainers at GE really understand what your challenges are,” says Debra L. Mitchell, RN, BSN, MBA, administrator for St. Petersburg, Fla.-based Children’s Orthopaedic & Scoliosis Surgery Associates. “In fact, the person who trained us [on Centricity Practice Solution in 2003] is still there. GE’s trainers have been in your shoes, and really do understand what your challenges are. There are probably some practices that don’t buy enough training time — that’s a big mistake.”

Also, internal meetings are important before setting up or upgrading Centricity, Mitchell says. “It’s such a flexible system, and there are so many different ways it can be set up. It’s important to know what you want the system to do for you, and those goals will help you make the right customization choices. When I set up our system, I looked at MGMA and their survey, and I matched my reports to their surveys. That’s just one example.”

About Children’s Orthopaedic and Scoliosis Surgery Associates, LLC

Children’s Orthopaedic and Scoliosis Surgery Associates LLC strives to provide outstanding pediatric orthopaedic care to children and young adults along the West Coast of Florida. Care is provided by physicians with outstanding credentials, backed by board certifications and pediatric orthopaedic fellowships. Its physicians provide care using advanced technology, resulting in optimized outcomes. Treatment is focused on the individual patient’s needs through specialized care. Each physician brings commitment, compassion, integrity, experience and technical expertise to the practice.

The practice’s spine surgeons perform more than 120 scoliosis surgeries per year, using specialized computerized navigation technology that increases the precision and accuracy of the surgery.

Additionally, each physician at Children’s Orthopaedic and Scoliosis Surgery Associates is dedicated to advancing treatment, education and research in the field of pediatric orthopaedic surgery. Each is a clinical or affiliate professor at the University of South Florida’s (USF) College Of Medicine, and the practice is the primary clinical rotation site for pediatric orthopaedics for USF orthopaedic residents.

For more details, visit www.chortho.com.
About GE Healthcare

GE Healthcare provides transformational medical technologies and services that are shaping a new age of patient care. Our broad expertise in medical imaging and information technologies, medical diagnostics, patient monitoring systems, drug discovery, biopharmaceutical manufacturing technologies, performance improvement and performance solutions services help our customers to deliver better care to more people around the world at a lower cost. In addition, we partner with healthcare leaders, striving to leverage the global policy change necessary to implement a successful shift to sustainable healthcare systems.

Our “healthymagination” vision for the future invites the world to join us on our journey as we continuously develop innovations focused on reducing costs, increasing access and improving quality around the world. Headquartered in the United Kingdom, GE Healthcare is a unit of General Electric Company (NYSE: GE). Worldwide, GE Healthcare employees are committed to serving healthcare professionals and their patients in more than 100 countries. For more information about GE Healthcare, visit our website at www.gehealthcare.com.

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