



Case Study: St. Alexius Medical Center

Bismarck, North Dakota



“The systems work like the in-house versions, and there was no special training required.”

—Tamara Darling, health information management director, St. Alexius

Proven results

- Increased coder productivity by 10 percent as a direct result of the remote coding program
- Improved coder retention
- Provided a distinct coder recruitment advantage in the geographic area

3M products used by St. Alexius Medical Center

- 3M™ Health Record Management (HRM) Software
- 3M™ Coding and Reimbursement System
- 3M™ Coding Reference Software and 3M™ Coding Reference Plus Software

Snapshot: St. Alexius Medical Center

Type of facility: St. Alexius is a 264-bed medical center and the major healthcare provider for the region around Bismarck, serving central and western North Dakota, northern South Dakota, and eastern Montana.

Number of beds: 264

Inpatient admissions: 925 monthly

Outpatient visits: 5,220 monthly

The challenge

Winter winds blow cold and the snow gets deep in Bismarck, North Dakota. But thanks to a remote coding program, St. Alexius Medical Center’s home-based coders can stay warm in their homes without missing a day of work. In a rural area where many employees live long distances from the hospital, the program has allowed St. Alexius to not only retain and effectively recruit experienced coders, but also achieve significant increases in coder productivity.

The approach

Before allowing coders to work from home, St. Alexius provided remote computer access to other areas of the organization, such as the finance department and transcriptionists. Both the IT infrastructure and experience were already in place to extend remote access to HIM department personnel.

In addition, the HIM department itself was well-prepared for the change. “We started building our electronic medical record in October 1992,” says Tamara Darling, health information management director for St. Alexius. The hospital uses an optical imaging system to scan and combine patient data into



St. Alexius Medical Center

one electronic medical record that can be accessed by authorized users, including coders.

Within 48 hours of a patient's discharge, the patient's record is available in the optical imaging system, and from that point onward, the medical record is wholly electronic. St. Alexius uses the 3M™ Health Record Management (HRM) Software alongside of the optical imaging system to complete the record abstracting process.

For coding, the organization uses the 3M™ Coding and Reimbursement System, along with the optional 3M™ Coding Reference Software and 3M™ Coding Reference Plus Software modules, which provide coders with online access to the latest versions of industry-standard references. The 3M coding system incorporates expert logic to guide coders through a series of relevant decisions for each diagnosis and procedure.

To connect the coders to the hospital's application server, St. Alexius uses a single Microsoft® Terminal Server connected to a Virtual Private Network (VPN) device with a firewall. The optical imaging system, the 3M Health Record Management Software, and the 3M Coding and Reimbursement System all run on the terminal server. Remote coders tie in via a high-speed connection and attach to a Terminal Server network.

Joy Krush, RHIT, CCS, CCS-P, St. Alexius' reimbursement and coding supervisor, claims, "Writing the policies and procedures took the majority of time for implementation. We already had an electronic record in place and had been coding from scanned and interfaced medical records using this workflow for two years."

Darling says little help was required from 3M to set up the remote coders. After installation, most problems were solved in less than a day. "The systems work like the in-house versions, and there was no special training required," says Darling, adding that the people at home use the systems "as if they're right here."

The results

St. Alexius has six coders, and three of them are now working remotely. Darling says the extensive electronic coding arrangement and familiar workflow made it easy to

convert to remote coding. "Our coders were already used to electronic coding, so sending them home was the natural next step."

Setting up the remote coders has improved St. Alexius' retention rate, an important consideration in a small labor market. For example, one of St. Alexius' remote coders is a new mother. Faced with returning to the road as a commuter, she could have opted to leave the work force altogether. "Remote coding has helped us retain her and other coders," says Darling.

Remote coding has had some impact on staff FTEs, with one employee going from 40 to 36 hours per week. In the outpatient area, the HIM department has been able to absorb additional job functions without adding head count.

Both Darling and Krush cite the primary benefit of the remote coding program as a significant improvement in productivity. Darling notes, "Anytime you have a productivity improvement, it improves turnaround."

Krush also credits the 3M™ Coding Reference Software and 3M™ Coding Reference Plus Software with being key to the improved productivity in her department. These software packages give coders online access to the industry-standard references they are most likely to need during a coding session. Clicking on a highlighted term allows coders to jump to the appropriate reference to help ensure that coding is accurate, complete, and compliant.

Remote coder productivity has been and continues to be measured. "We were looking for about a 10 to 13 percent increase in production with going home, combined with the 7 to 10 percent increase with concurrent coding from an electronic record, for a total of a 20 percent increase," Krush says. Having achieved the 20 percent overall improvement goal—with 10 percent directly attributed to the remote coding effort—St. Alexius' HIM department and its coders have clearly found a better way to weather those North Dakota winters.

Call today

For more information on how 3M solutions can assist your organization, contact your 3M sales representative, call us toll-free at **800-367-2447**, or visit us online at **www.3Mhis.com**.



Health Information Systems

575 West Murray Boulevard
Salt Lake City, UT 84123
U.S.A.
800 367 2447
www.3Mhis.com

3M is a trademark of 3M Company.
Microsoft is a registered trademark of
Microsoft Corporation.

Please recycle. Printed in U.S.A.
© 3M 2008. All rights reserved.
Published 09/08
70-2009-9010-2