

WHITE PAPER

A Complete Guide to Healthcare Process Automation



Process Fusion

Healthcare Referral Management Automation

Did you know that the United States is a world leader in the cost of healthcare administration? [The New England Journal of Medicine](#) estimated that the embedded cost of administration in healthcare is 30%. To put that into context, for an average American family, out of the \$19,000 they pay per year for healthcare coverage, \$5700 of that will go to healthcare administration.

The administration that goes into running a hospital or health information system involves a huge amount of time and resources.

Unfortunately, a lot of healthcare administration is done without regard for improving business processes through technology.

By strategically automating labor-intensive business processes, it will alleviate the burden of administration processing and allow for better management of a healthcare organization's revenue by reducing wasteful time and costs.



Why Automate Your Healthcare Processes?

A big driver for automation comes down to the cost savings it provides. But that isn't to say that cost savings is the only consideration. Automation also helps healthcare organizations put their staff to work on what is important and where they are really needed.

Cost Savings

The [CAQH](#) estimates that the U.S. healthcare industry can save an additional \$11 billion dollars annually by automating business processes around claims and eligibility data.

A lot of tasks revolving around claims or referral processing involves manual repetitive tasks that are perfect for automation. A typical hospital spends around 50-60% of its expenses on salaries and benefits, and three out of four CEOs say that creating efficiencies are one of their top financial priorities.

Deploying a smart automation plan can reduce the costs of administration in any healthcare organization and allow staff to focus more on patient care.

Optimizing Resources

Without a doubt, the human mind is still the best tool for strategic planning and critical thinking, but people are prone to making mistakes.

Automation is best when it comes to this kind of work. The more automation that is implemented on this type of repetitive, high volume work, the more data is available for analysis of your business, giving staff more tools to strategically push the business forward.



What Can Be Automated?

In general, anything that revolves around the transmission, processing, reporting and analysis of data can be automated. When it comes to automation for hospitals and healthcare organizations, there are many options. We will be covering a few important ones.

Staff Communication

Performing healthcare administrative tasks more efficiently can go a long way in reducing staff stress. Automating a universal dashboard where all communications centrally arrive in one place can support back and forth communication required with new reporting standards. This enables healthcare staff greater visibility to take control of more administrative tasks that slow down physicians, giving them more time to spend on patient care.

A universal inbox hub with electronic fax and document management can also help reduce communication redundancies. Whereas processes of manual scanning and faxing are costly, time-consuming and stressful. By automating this process, it enables staff to easily review, split and combine pages in less time.

Patient Communication

On average, it takes three phone calls to connect with a patient to tell them their report results are normal. Staff must call the patient, leave a message, wait for a call back or call the patient again to deliver the results. No one likes manually calling, as it is costly and inefficient.

A secure text automation can easily send one text message to a patient that links them to a verification page and once they enter in their date of birth, receives their lab results. This automated process can happen in under one minute, compared to the manual process, which may take over an hour. Patients are happier, and staff are not stuck playing phone tag.

Machine Learning

Machine learning is the discipline of using programmatic solutions to implement statistical models on data. These models seek to give information to an organization to help improve decision making. The machine learns the dataset and can provide information about how the data points to a macro view of the overall process.

Machine learning can be used in many applications of healthcare administration. It can be used to perform experimental checks on third party data by programmatically modeling data received from them and determine when the integrity of the data might be compromised. These types of statistical models can help give more insight into issues earlier and stop it before it further corrupts your processes.

Machine learning can also be used to set about creating a model to predict if a referral should be considered clean versus rejected and approved versus denied. As the model learns to classify referrals, healthcare organizations should still employ a manual review, but will not need to review each referral as intently. Using these models, machine learning can group referrals and determine where the biggest ROI for your time investment should be.

Referral Documents

One of the biggest areas of impact for automation is referral processing. Healthcare patients increasingly have several specialists who need to coordinate care, yet information can get left out in transit as providers struggle with administrative or technological challenges.

Between home health referrals, durable medical equipment (DME) orders and prior authorizations – coordinating approvals, sign-offs, record updates and orders – managing referrals is a time-consuming process for everyone.

By deploying a single collaboration and automation platform that integrates and builds on the EMR system can streamline this process. Physicians can place a home health referral, order DME, submit paperwork for approval and file a record to the patient's chart all digitally without touching paper.

Data Workflows

Healthcare documents that need to be approved or denied or patient appointments that need to be scheduled can present a whole host of challenges. Traditionally, it was effective to have certain types of healthcare referrals reviewed by a portion of a larger team. Many referrals would be rejected and come back for review again, and in order to improve this process, they would have the same person review it again or hire specialized staff to review those documents.

These types of modifications in the traditional process would help reduce errors, improve efficiency and reduce costs by improving turnaround times on the review of healthcare referrals.

However, in the modern healthcare world, to truly realize an efficiency gain on these types of workflows, you will want to consider employing automation technology. The most important function that you will want to automation is the distribution of referrals to referring physicians. A robust automated workflow would give staff the ability to manage the distribution by modifying the members on a given distribution list, reassigning referrals for unexpected conflicts, and excluding members from receiving referrals for certain periods.

Additionally, automating this workflow facilitates additional business intelligence on the process, giving staff the ability to better manage turnaround time, get more insight into high or low volume periods, and see how efficiently team members are reviewing referrals. All these things will keep referrals moving without having to rely on traditional manual processes.

How to Get Started

The first step to getting started on your digital transformation journey is to figure out where your attention is best served in your healthcare organization. It is a good exercise to look at where you are today and where you would like to be in the future.

Put an initial list of ideas together. Look at areas where you can easily and strategically improve the business. See what healthcare staff are spending too much time doing and where automation technology can help.

Next, look at what kind of activities your staff should be focusing their time on. For example, healthcare providers need to focus directly on patient care, and administrative staff needs to focus on strategy. Find out areas where healthcare staff can add real value to the business and think about all the extra activities they do that fall outside of these areas. How many of these activities can be automated?

Consider looking at what departmental domain knowledge can be harnessed into an automated solution. Often, important domain knowledge is stored in the hands of a few staff members and not documented anywhere. Building an automation around a formalized domain knowledge will help document important information and gain better efficiencies. Once there is a formal process, it will be easier for staff to understand niche areas of their healthcare organizations and identify areas of further improvement.

Putting the Right Team Together

Enlist assistance from experts, depending on your comfort level with strategic automation. If you have technical resources on hand, they can help you answer these types of questions and work through the implementation. Less technical staff may often miss big opportunities for efficiency improvements as it is outside of their skill set.

A helpful option to consider is engaging a consulting team to help guide you through this process. Make the most out of the domain knowledge in your organization and leverage that information to create a comprehensive automation solution.

Finding the Right Partner

It is crucial to find the right solution partner. Your healthcare organization will have its own unique set of criteria for who you want to work with, but there are some things that are common place.

Most important is to find a partner that has both industry and technical knowledge. Likewise, having a subject matter expert in healthcare that isn't an expert in database design, application development or doesn't know the latest trends in technology, is not going to set you up for success. Insist on partners showing a proven track record in implementing their automation solution in the specified area of interest.

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