

Credentialing from the Ground Up

Improvements drop application turnaround from 84 to 18 days

Client

The client is a 400-bed acute care hospital.

Background & Challenges

Prior to the arrival of The Greeley Company on site, the client faced significant challenges in the organization's credentialing department.

The issues were not limited to in-house challenges, however: most specifically, the organization's third party verification service was not performing adequately, compounding the issues presented by the work being done by the hospital itself.

Once on site, Greeley staff identified a number of issues requiring immediate resolution, including delinquent reappointments, applications for privileges not processed appropriately, significant issues with licenses being validated appropriately—or with identifying if there were any restrictions or issues with a physician's license, and a database that was not being managed appropriately or maintained in a timely manner.

Another, specific challenge was the inexistence of hard copies of the department's files. A previous director had elected to scan an entire year's worth of applications and appointments into a shared database, but as the documents were scanned, the original hard copies were destroyed, which made improving the database particularly challenging.

“You need a database working at its fullest potential. The database and credentialing software system will do a lot of the work for you, if functioning properly,” said the Greeley expert brought on board to take over stewardship of the organization's credentialing department.

Systems are now available that will track if physicians are licensed in their state, but such a system must be in place and properly set up to work.

Greeley Findings & Solutions

The need for a number of immediate changes was readily apparent once Greeley staff arrived on scene in February 2013; starting with addressing the poor quality of work the facility had received from its Credentialing Verification Organization (CVO).

It was quickly determined that the contract with the CVO would be terminated, but this is not a step that can happen haphazardly. The Greeley director and her team determined an appropriate termination date, taking into account the quarterly processing of appointments. The CVO was notified mid-summer of an October termination date, allowing those applications already in process to be completed before transitioning over.

Other changes were less clear cut, however. Because of the wide array of challenges found in the department, reconstructing the credentialing process went in stages.

“It evolved over time,” said the director. “Each month we would process applications and see where we needed to make adjustments. We were trying to set things up so they flowed nicely and confirm we had all the necessary elements. We needed to really look through each file and see where we had any potential problems.”

While rebuilding a department and its processes from the ground up is challenging, it did provide the director and her team the chance to find and then address or improve any number of problem areas with the credentialing process.

Communication improvements

“There were data entry issues, and process issues with communication of changes. The challenges we found weren’t just about credentialing, but also about how do we communicate the needs of the department out? What’s the best way to communicate with the hospital, with physicians, and with staff members?” explained the director.

The department has improved physician satisfaction and relations by working with physicians to make sure application and reappointment information is communicated out in a way that is useful and appropriate for the physicians.

Significant decreases in application turnaround time

The contract with Greeley specified that turnaround times for applications would be improved to 21 days or fewer to fully verify an applicant. Prior to Greeley coming on board, applications were taking an average of 84 days to process. Since the change of management, that number has dropped to under 18 days, exceeding the expectations of the contract.

“The number and volume of applications did not decrease during this time. They’ve actually increased,” noted the director.

A new focus for physician leaders

While a faster turnaround time for physician applications means these professionals are on board and providing service sooner, the change in how the department handles applications—with the format of files presented for review much improved—had an ancillary benefit as well.

“Leaders can truly focus on reviewing the content of an application for the quality of the practitioner, rather than checking if the name was spelled right,” said the director. The previous, unprofessional presentation of these applications to leadership had become a distraction.

“Having a standard, consistent format so you know where each element is and you know how every file is going to look allows them to focus on what they truly should be doing as a physician leader” when reviewing applications, said the director.

Setting higher standards and expectations

The credentialing department itself has benefited from these changes. So much so that sister organizations in the region have looked into importing some of the hospital’s changes to improve their own credentialing processes and departments. “The work they’ve done in the past year has built confidence in the department. The work they do is seen as best practice,” said the director.

Perhaps most telling about the improvement in both process and communication in the credentialing department is the growing relationship between the department and the physician relations department. Because of the improvements to the credentialing process and the department’s data management, the physician relations department now looks to the credentialing department to have a better understanding of what’s going on with the organization’s physicians to assist with their work in business development, marketing, and recruitment.

But after the first year, the improvements have been so successful that there is talk about centralizing the overarching organization’s credentialing services.

“We’ve had some mock surveys where the physicians have been blown away,” said the director.

Even more improvements are waiting in the wings, but will require some improvements and upgrades to database technology to fully implement.

“We’re the only hospital in this region using the database at the level we are,” said the director.

ABOUT GREELEY

The Greeley Company

Headquartered in the greater Boston area, The Greeley Company serves administrative and clinical teams in more than 500 healthcare organizations nationwide each year—ranging from the largest healthcare systems and academic medical centers to critical access rural hospitals. We have a rich history of providing innovative consulting, education, outsourcing solutions, interim staffing, and external peer review to healthcare organizations nationwide. Greeley focuses on contemporary needs and challenges related to medical staff optimization & physician alignment; accreditation, regulatory compliance & quality; and credentialing & privileging.

Our mission

The Greeley Company's mission is to help healthcare organizations improve efficiency, comply with regulations and standards, achieve practitioner engagement and alignment, and excel in delivering high-quality, cost-effective patient care.

Our clients

Our clients include healthcare organizations of all sizes and types—from large, multi-setting healthcare systems and academic medical centers to critical access rural hospitals. We work with clinical and administrative individuals and teams across the entire organization including physicians, executives, directors, managers, and frontline staff.

Our advisors and staff

The Greeley Company provides our clients with a dedicated team of advisors who bring valuable experience and rich backgrounds as former hospital, nurse, and physician executives, as former “Big 4” consultants, and as former regulatory surveyors. Our professionals understand your pain and provide the breadth and depth of preparation, training, and education needed to drive success. Behind our advisors stand talented management and support staff committed to ensuring the highest level of customized attention and client fulfillment.

Contact us

Please contact us at 888/749-3054 or info@greeley.com for more information on how The Greeley Company can help you meet your challenges and goals.