

Clarity Drives Collections

Accurate Up-Front Estimates and Convenient Payment Options Boost the Bottom Line for Gwinnett Medical Center

Introduction

Gwinnett Medical Center couldn't accurately calculate patient payment estimates, and consequently did minimal pre-service collections.

Meanwhile, the hospital also recognized an urgent need to offer convenient payment options for patients, and provide on-site financial counselors the ability to do point-of-service collections.

The two-hospital health system in suburban Atlanta turned to RelayHealth for a suite of products to provide clear connections to financial information, offer multiple payment options for patients, and give onsite staff the ability to collect payments at multiple points throughout the care process. The results: decreased call center volume, month-over-month collections up 62 percent, monthly online collections over \$600k, and online patient payments totaling more than \$600,000 per month.

About Gwinnett Medical Center

Gwinnett Medical Center (GMC) began as a rural hospital more than 60 years ago, serving the needs of patients far from Atlanta. As the region has grown, so has GMC, with 553 beds at hospitals in the Atlanta area communities of Lawrenceville and Duluth.

The system received America's 100 Best Hospitals Award from HealthGrades® in 2012, one of only three Georgia hospitals to make the list. For the past five years, GMC has received HealthGrades' Distinguished Hospital Award for Clinical Excellence. Its stroke, pulmonary and critical care programs have received similar honors.

Gwinnett Medical Center-Lawrenceville is recognized as a national leader in single-incision laparoscopic surgery and houses a Level II trauma center, while Gwinnett Medical Center-Duluth offers an array of specialty services, including surgical weight management, da Vinci® robotic surgery and sports medicine.

The Need for Accurate Estimates, Convenient Payment Options

Hospital bills often run into the hundreds of thousands of dollars, yet few patients pay full price because of government and private insurance contracts, discounts for cash and other factors. But when James Barwick took over as pre-authorization manager with GMC, he was told not to provide information about contracted rates.

The reason? GMC could not accurately calculate a payment estimate for patients, and consequently collected few dollars in advance of tests and procedures. Additionally, callers to the system's pricing hotline could only receive estimates based on full-price charges, which "scared them away pretty quickly," Barwick recalls. "It was my belief that we were losing business," Barwick says. "We needed a more efficient way to interact with our patients and tell them what they would owe at the time of service."

Since patient billing and payment processes are inextricably linked, these issues were impacting customer service, staff efficiency and, ultimately, cash flow. If patient does not understand a bill, it's less likely to be paid on time. Convenience—in the form of multiple patient-friendly payment options—is a huge factor in timely reimbursement.

To help GMC maximize collections and remain competitive with MRI and other specialty diagnostic centers, hospital leaders knew they needed a better way to calculate estimated payments. They turned to RelayHealth Financial for a suite of solutions to provide clear connections to financial information, offer convenient payment options for patients, and give onsite staff the ability to collect payments at multiple points throughout the care process.

"We're breaking down all of the barriers to payment," says Travis Mendenhall, Senior Systems Analyst at GMC. "When a patient receives a bill, any obstacle that leads them to not pay the bill must be overcome."



Quick Facts

- **Location:** Lawrenceville & Duluth, GA
- **Solutions:** RelayClearance, RelayAccount Online, RelayClearance Services
- **Beds:** 553 Licensed in 2 Facilities
- **Employees:** 4,800
- **Medical Staff:** Over 800 Affiliated Physicians

// We're breaking down all of the barriers to payment. //

— Travis Mendenhall, Senior Systems Analyst, Gwinnett Medical Center

Verify, Validate, Estimate... Collect

GMC uses RelayClearance™ Plus to generate a qualified estimate that is turned over to roaming financial counselors or is available when the patient registers. At first, these counselors collected from potential self-pay patients in the ED, but the program quickly expanded to include collecting deductibles from patients on the floor, and reaching out to patients before their hospital visits.

RelayClearance Plus allows providers to easily validate patient identity, verify insurance eligibility, estimate patient financial responsibility, accept point-of-service collections, and refer those unable to pay to charity or other financial assistance. It increases collections on self-pay patients by calculating a pre-service estimated bill to properly set patients' financial expectations.

"The solution allows us to tell the patient to the penny what he will owe," Barwick says. "A full-price MRI might be \$2,500, but our contracted rate may only be 50 cents on the dollar. To a patient with a 20% co-insurance, that's much more palatable and makes us more competitive in our market."

GMC had issues calculating eligibility that turned out to be simple unfamiliarity with the software. To make sure it takes full advantage of the RelayClearance solution, the hospital also uses RelayClearance Professional Services. "The software is only as good as those who were paying the most attention," Barwick says. "With Professional Services, they walked us through implementation and beyond."

The estimation capability in RelayClearance provided the added benefit of facilitating point-of-service and back-end collections using RelayHealth online bill payment solutions.

Recognizing that patients wanted more self-serve online payment options, GMC launched RelayAccount™ Online in 2010. Users access online payments through the hospital website. Enrolled patients can log in to view and pay their bills, and un-enrolled patients can pay their bills.

Patients can review payment plan options, receive information about charity care and get their questions answered through FAQs, which also reduces call center volume.

To facilitate point-of-service payment, GMC uses the RelayAccount WebPay tool. Financial counselors in fixed locations use credit card readers and WebPay to accept payments. Roving counselors can access WebPay from any web-enabled computer to add credit card information, but the organization is exploring the use of tablet computers with card readers to enable payment from the bedside.

Additional training on the importance of generating estimates and a change in hospital policy have helped GMC ensure that up-front collection discussions are now standard operating procedure.

This Technology is All About Making it Easier to Get Paid

The changes brought statements that are easier for patients to understand and online payments that total more than \$600,000 each month. Providing credible estimates and making payment easier for patients has brought increased revenue for GMC.

With RelayClearance Plus, monthly collections rose 62 percent from \$124,687 to \$201,598 in just six months. Two-thirds of the preauthorization department's fiscal year collection goal of \$1.5 million was realized in just six months.

Critical Issues:

- Inability to estimate patient co-pays and deductibles in advance
- Inability to provide contract pricing
- Need to increase collections
- Lack of online and on-site payment and collection options

Results:

- Can now calculate costs to the penny
- Roaming financial counselors collect directly from patients
- Month-to-month collections up 62%
- Decreased call center volume
- Monthly online collections over \$600k
- Over 39,000 online collections in initial 12 months

"RelayHealth helped us understand the software and develop work list capabilities. With RelayClearance Plus, we increased collections and gave our customer service staff the tools they need to provide patients information on precisely what they will owe."

Leveraging RelayAccount WebPay and RelayAccount Online options, GMC now processes more than 3,200 online payment transactions and averages over \$375,000 in collections per month. WebPay speeds the payment posting process from four or five days to overnight—improving Gwinnett's collection numbers. "We felt the effects immediately in customer service through reduced call volume," Mendenhall says.

"We are trying to be as friendly and easy as we can about billing."



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