
Blueway Tracker Case Study - Implementing a Backbone Audit Management Solution Transforms a Multi-Facility Healthcare Organization's Process and Achieves 93% Automation

Summary

With the national rollout of Medicare's Recovery Audit Contractor (RA) program in 2010, hospitals across the country were in critical need of a solution to manage their audit processes and protect revenue—and this multi-facility health system was no different. The Recovery Audit Program's mission is to identify and correct Medicare improper payments and implement actions to prevent future improper payments for health care services provided to Medicare beneficiaries. In anticipation of the program, the client established a Health Information Management (HIM) corporate RAC department to manage its audit support activities. At the onset of the program, the team was effectively managing its low volume of cases through manual processes and a number of disparate systems. But as the RA program quickly gained momentum, so did the challenges facing the team. Within a few years, the client was looking for a comprehensive, integrated solution that would enable them to enhance quality and data integrity; increase capacity; and work seamlessly across internal functions and with external partners. This new solution needed to not only address the increase in Medicare audits but also audits from Medicaid and Commercial Insurance Carriers.

Notable Results

- From 90% manual data entry to 93% automation.
- Standardized workflows implemented across multiple facilities.
- Reduction in time spent managing task delegation and workflows, from 16 hours per month to less than 1 hour per month.
- Reduction in time spent on financial reporting, from 4 hours per week to nearly zero.

The Challenge

Through the first two years of audit activity, operating under their homegrown process and systems, the volume of audit activities rapidly accelerated. By January 2013, the team was facing challenges that amounted to:

- Over 6,000 record requests
- Millions in post-pay and pre-pay reimbursement at risk
- 40% denial rate

The volume of activities began stressing the processes in place to reveal workflow gaps and inefficiencies. Driving these challenges was the lack of integration between the existing audit tracking software and client's systems for key activities such as billing, medical records and financial reporting. The result was a process that was 90% manual and at risk for data quality issues.

Technical Challenges – A Closer Look

- Tracking high-volume denials.
- Lack of integration with existing systems.
- Inability to synchronize claim and remittance data.
- Manual work lists and calculations of

This made it difficult to manage audit support activities among RA department team members, across the organization and with third-party support vendors—all of which impacted the ability to provide timely responses to record requests and appeal deadlines.

Adding further complexity during this time, the number of RA audits was growing. And other Medicare fee-for-service programs commenced audit activity, adding to the volume of work that needed to be managed and tracked. On top of that, the client was expanding. The organization was adding several new facilities that all needed to be integrated into a corporate RA structure that could support consistency and standardization across multiple facilities.

It soon became clear the team did not have the right resources in place to efficiently support its fast-paced and growing needs.

Identifying a Solution

The client needed a new solution that would provide a strong foundation for the evolution of its RA audit management process—a solution that would enable an integrated, streamlined approach; seamless data sharing; and automated workflows. Manual work that required significant staff time plagued the existing process and often was the result of the audit software not “talking” to the client’s other systems.

Identifying a scalable solution also was critical. The organizational expansion underway meant onboarding several new regional facilities to the RA audit management process. Ensuring an easy and painless transition for the end-users would be essential for success.

Beyond the technical requirements of a new solution, the client wanted the support of a technology solutions provider that understood the complexity of RA audits and would facilitate the continued evolution of its audit process. This would mean finding an expert vendor that had the industry understanding to look ahead, identify potential impacts on the workflows and proactively make appropriate system enhancements to continue to drive efficiency.

Technical Requirements

- Integration and access for vendor partners.
- Real-time appeal tracking.
- Electronic repository for all correspondence.
- Financial reporting.

After carefully evaluating a number of options, the client chose Bluemark’s Blueway Tracker Solution, an integrated, comprehensive audit and workflow management solution equipped to handle all audit types under the Medicare Fee-for-Service program: RA, Pre-Pay Reviews, and CERT, plus Medicaid and commercial payer. Blueway Tracker’s core strength is aligning people, processes and disparate systems—acting as the “backbone” that ties together all systems and vendors involved in the audit management process.

System Design: The Audit Management Backbone

The business needs defined by the client directed the design of the solution. The Blueway Tracker system provided an ideal foundation, but implementation would need to satisfy the specific requirements of the organization to be considered a success. That meant customizing certain aspects of the solution, accomplished through close collaboration among the project team.

Blueway Tracker was an excellent starting point for many reasons; its existing interface methods were paramount in satisfying the disparate interface requirements. These existing interface methods were leveraged to implement the specified needs of the client. This Figure illustrates the system design at the very highest level. The designed system is built around Blueway Tracker being the backbone that coordinates all system traffic.



The implementation process required strong project management to ensure all involved parties—both internal client stakeholders and third-party vendors—were aligned and that the systems used by each would be able to communicate seamlessly through the Blueway Tracker backbone.

To ensure success, project managers were required of all vendors that were part of this project, with the client designating a project manager to act as the “alpha” project lead. Standard project management techniques were used throughout the implementation, providing a strong framework and invaluable support given the complicated technical nature of the implementation and the number of parties involved. Written plans, excellent technical interface documents, status calls and strong communication around issues were among the core tools that established a strong foundation for the project’s success.

Key Results

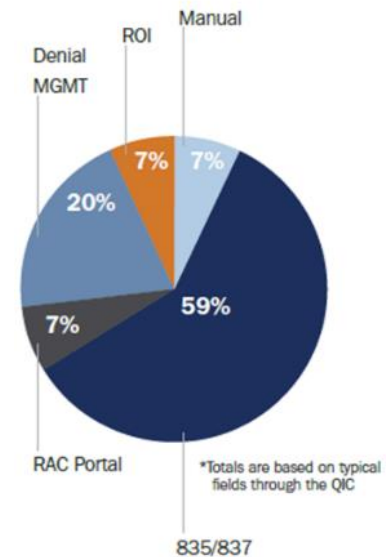
- All facilities have successfully implemented Blueway Tracker with standardized workflows across the system. A strong backbone audit system-with technical capability and understanding of the RA process is necessary for this to happen.
- Real-time work lists available any time to end-users and managers. Helps meet deadlines, allows RA case manager to prioritize team’s work and reassign as needed, and tells us how many days left for appeal.

- Enhanced data integrity as the result of increased automation
Achieved 93% data field automation. Before this, the team was relying on nurses to complete data entry instead of working on appeals/denials. This required significant “monitoring” of the billing system because our feeds of claims and remittance data were not automated.
- Reduction in time spent creating and reviewing work lists from 16 hours per month to < 1 hour per month.
- Greater confidence in data reported to the organization’s finance department and other audiences
 - Reduction in time spent running reports and validating data with financial reporting team—marked by a drop from 4 hours a week to nearly zero
 - Reduction in support needed to execute reporting requirements, of Financial Reporting FTE from 1.0 to .5

AUTOMATION RESULTS

Overall data automation averages 93%*

Data Sources Leveraged



About Blueway Tracker

Blueway Tracker is a cloud-based audit management platform developed to support Medicare, Medicaid and Commercial Payers audits. This third generation of the solution brings improvements in case management, claims and remittance file interfacing, payer contract tools, and reporting. It also includes the option of direct electronic document transmissions through CMS’ esMD Gateway. In total, Blueway Tracker is the most powerful audit management and response solution available in the market today.

About Bluemark

Bluemark is a specialized software developer providing expert solutions for health care professionals through the powerful combination of adaptive technology and industry expertise. One of the company’s core tenets is to improve the financial performance of health care providers’ operating margins. Bluemark was founded in 2001 and is headquartered in New Paltz, New York.