

# HIM INTERIM MANAGEMENT & CONSULTING: NORTH HAWAII COMMUNITY HOSPITAL



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SUCCESS STORY





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North Hawaii Community Hospital (NHCH) is a private, non-profit community hospital located in Waimea (also known as Kamuela), the largest town in the interior of Hawaii's Big Island. Waimea's mountains and rolling green pastures make it the center for ranching activities and the "paniolo" (Hawaiian cowboy) culture. NHCH serves more than 30,000 North Hawaii residents and has 354 employees and 69 volunteers. With just 33 beds, the hospital is almost always at 100% occupancy.

### THE CHALLENGE

In the Summer of 2011, NHCH found itself without an HIM Director. With no system of reporting metrics such as transcription turnaround or ROI, the hospital was not only at a disadvantage with Meaningful Use and other Pay-for-Performance initiatives, but also was facing the risk of being unprepared for the transition to the ICD-10 coding classification system. The HIM Department was operating in discrete silos with little interaction among the various areas and job functions. Perhaps the most daunting problem of the NHCH HIM Department was the culture of the department itself, which had remained virtually unchanged during the past 16 years since the hospital had opened its doors.

NHCH was a great hospital with a great story to tell about the quality of care it was providing. But in order to tell that story, the organization needed an HIM Department that was able to report healthcare data in a meaningful way and an HIM Director who could step in and provide the leadership necessary to organize the department, put reporting and other workflow processes in place and, perhaps most importantly, empower the department staff with the skills and training they needed to do their jobs in the most effective manner. NHCH's CFO at the time had positive experiences with Precyse in the past, so in the midst of this crisis situation, he recommended that NHCH call on Precyse for HIM Interim Management and Consulting services.

### THE SOLUTION

Precyse appointed Robin Reilly, RHIT, as Interim Director of HIM for NHCH. Reilly's first order of business was building the trust of the HIM Department employees. "The HIM staff had worked in an environment where there wasn't much communication," said Reilly. "They were not encouraged to ask questions or to try to find better ways of doing things. They had only been taught the very basic functions of their jobs, without ever learning about how their jobs intertwined with other jobs in the department. When I came into the department as HIM Director, I think they expected it to be business as usual. I could tell they were wary of me."

To win the trust of the HIM employees, Reilly made it a point to emphasize to them over and over again that the hospital had brought in Precyse to help them and to educate them. When Precyse begins an engagement like NHCH, the team starts with the basics, educating them about the medical record and the HIM Department's important role interacting with both clinical and financial systems. Precyse broke down the silos in the department by revising all the job descriptions, which were still the same from the inception of the department 16 years ago, and by cross-training all employees in the other departmental job functions.

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**Robin Reilly, RHIT, Interim Director of HIM for NHCH**

"Because most of the employees in the department had been brought over from the services industry, the medical record



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was a foreign concept to them,” said Reilly. “No one had ever taken the time to explain to them that it’s the story of the patient’s life while at the hospital and that the role of the HIM Department is to put that information in order and make meaningful use of it. As they began to better understand the importance of their role in the hospital, they became excited and empowered. One department employee had always wanted to become a coder, but had been afraid to ask for the necessary training. Once she gained more knowledge and her confidence increased, she had the courage to ask for training and now she is on her way to becoming a coder.”

In addition to basic HIM training, an overall education plan was established to prepare the staff for the transition to ICD-10. The training instilled confidence in the staff, and they soon realized how the training and education had empowered them to do their jobs more accurately and efficiently.

The addition of staff, especially a full-time Release of Information (ROI) Technician, produced immediate improvements. As a result, the turnaround time for medical records requests decreased from 4 days to just 1 day.

After winning the trust of the staff, the next task was to tackle reporting. “Though the department had all of the data necessary, reporting had never been performed,” said Reilly. Hospital administration had no way of measuring productivity or quality. They didn’t know how many doctors had deficiencies and unsigned and incomplete charts, and the physicians were not held accountable. The Joint Commission and other organizations require all medical records to be complete within 30 days, yet NHCH did not have reports to provide this information.

In 6 weeks, the HIM staff were able to put appropriate reporting procedures into place for NHCH. Now the hospital can run reports that show where they are in terms of DNFB, transcription turnaround and ROI. Administration can see trends and patterns each month and can see weaknesses as well as accomplishments.

The hospital wanted to revise bylaws and hold physicians accountable for delinquencies, so Precyse also began monitoring unbilled weekly charts. Under the new bylaws, coding queries that are not completed by physicians within 30 days after patient discharge are now included in the suspension process. Physicians are reminded of this policy in a special newsletter and in reminder letters. As a result of all of these efforts, NHCH has been able to keep unbilled charts to within a 3-day period, with the exception of a few outliers. The delinquency rate, which had been in the hundreds of percents, is now down to 6%-7%, from 1,200 to 200 charts.

A special project requested by the CFO was to run a Case Mix Index (CMI) report to verify the original data that had run in previous years, as they were not confident the data was accurate. The hospital desired a way to determine the diversity, clinical complexity or need for resources in the population of patients in the hospital. The resulting report revealed a CMI of .8, which indicated a low reimbursement status for NHCH. Armed with this information, the hospital has now implemented clinical documentation improvement (CDI) initiatives that can help support improved CMI and more appropriate reimbursement.

Precyse enhanced NHCH’s HIPAA compliance efforts by developing formalized compliance policies and procedures and educating the HIM staff through the creation of HIPAA Education PowerPoints.

Another of Reilly’s tasks as Interim HIM Director was to participate in recruitment efforts for a qualified permanent HIM Director for NHCH. Because the job force in the Hawaiian Islands is primarily hospitality and farm industry-focused, finding someone with the needed HIM experience in the local area was unlikely. And the remote location of the Hawaiian Islands made it difficult to recruit for this type of position. One year after Reilly arrived at NHCH, a new leader for the department was finally found: Shelly Halstead, RHIT. With 21 years of experience in the HIM industry, 11 of which included serving as an HIM Director, Halstead brought the ideal breadth of experience that was needed at NHCH. “I knew I would be leaving NHCH in good hands with Shelly,” said Reilly.

“Robin set things up so that it would be very easy for me to step in and lead the HIM Department,” said Halstead. “She made sure there were good policies and procedures in place, and she provided me with thorough documentation, much more than I ever had the benefit of receiving in previous positions. Even several months later, I still refer to her documentation whenever I have a question, and it’s always easy to find what I am looking for. And if I need to discuss something, she’s always very responsive through phone calls or email, even though she’s now thousands of miles away. Precyse really did a good job of transforming the HIM Department and preparing it for a new leader.”

***“PRECYSE REALLY DID A GOOD JOB OF TRANSFORMING THE HIM DEPARTMENT AND PREPARING IT FOR A NEW LEADER.”***

**Shelly Halstead, RHIT, Director, Health Information Management**



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## THE FUTURE

With Precyse's help, the future looks as bright as the sunny skies that are part of the typical Hawaiian landscape at NHCH.

"We really appreciated Precyse's assistance during a very difficult time for our HIM Department," said Bill Brown, Chief Executive Officer of NHCH. "The changes they put into place, particularly with reporting and billing, are really making a difference for us."

Added Dr. William Park, who was Chief Medical Officer during the Precyse engagement and continues practicing medicine at NHCH, "Precyse updated our HIM Department to where we needed to be. We benefit daily from what Precyse achieved here."

## RESULTS

The following is a short list of the accomplishments that were achieved during Precyse's Interim Management and Consulting assignment at North Hawaii Community Hospital:

- Reorganized HIM Department, revised job descriptions, added necessary employees
- Provided basic HIM training to employees and cross-trained them on all departmental job functions
- Hired Release of Information (ROI) Technician, decreasing medical records requests from 4 days to 1 day
- Hired HIM Tech for backlog scanning of ER records
- Achieved 24-hour turnaround for scanning, analyzing and coding charts
- Implemented reporting processes and procedures
- Decreased unbilled to a minimum of 3 days
- Decreased delinquency rate from 1,200 to 200 charts
- Established a process for Case Mix Index (CMI) reporting
- Established an ICD-10 education plan
- Revised hospital bylaws to include queries not completed after 30 days in the physician suspension process
- Developed a new forms policy
- Collaborated with Director of Quality and Director of PFS on RAC policy
- Enhanced HIPAA compliance by formalizing policies and procedures and educating staff through PowerPoints
- Secured chart storage vendor
- Completed 2012 annual budget
- Created protocol for physicians to sign records electronically
- Researched radiology dictation equipment and pricing of outpatient charts



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