

HOUSTON HEALTHCARE USES CENTRALIZED PATIENT ACCESS TO DRIVE NEW BUSINESS

CLOSED-LOOP COMMUNICATION HAS PROVIDER OFFICES LINING UP
TO USE ELECTRONIC ORDERING

CLIENT

Houston Healthcare is a not-for-profit health system that serves more than 300,000 people annually from Houston County, Robins Air Force Base and surrounding communities in central Georgia. It operates seven facilities, including two fully accredited acute care medical facilities, plus imaging, outpatient and other facilities.

HOUSTON HEALTHCARE CENTRAL GEORGIA

2 HOSPITALS (282 BEDS)
CENTRALIZED SCHEDULING FOR 6,500
EXAMS PER MONTH WITH 20 FTES

CHALLENGE

The Houston Healthcare Patient Access team processes all orders and provides centralized scheduling for all facilities and departments, except Interventional Radiology, Cardiology and Surgery. Common issues plagued them: manual and patient-dependent workflows, lost and illegible fax orders, incorrect or incomplete orders that result in denials or underpayments, scheduling delays, phone tag, on-hold and wait times. On top of that, their non-employed community providers were frustrated by Houston's non-transparent scheduling process. Without access to consistent data, it was nearly impossible track and improve upon critical performance metrics.

OPPORTUNITY

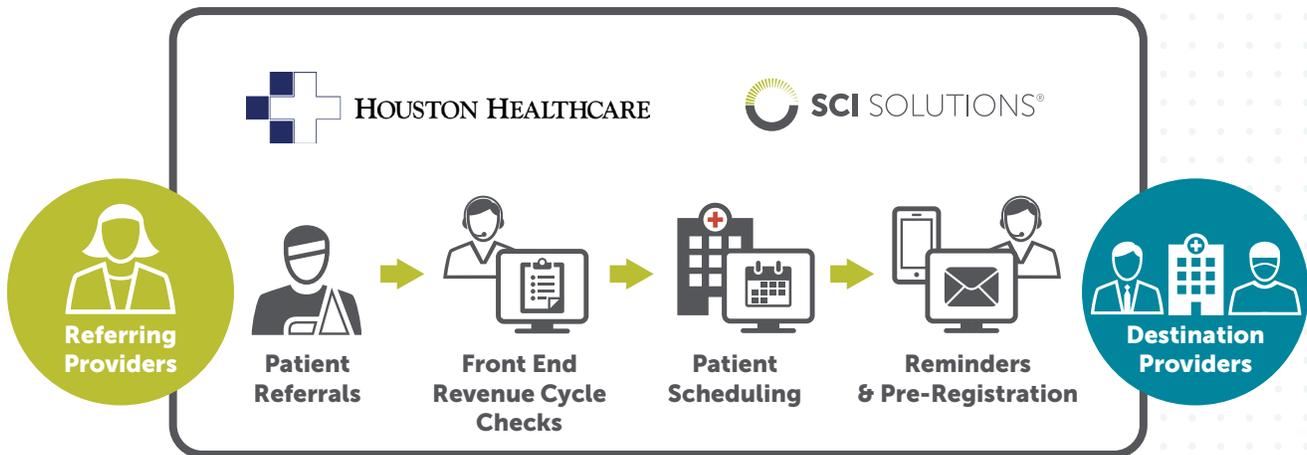
Houston selected the SCI Provider Network Manager and Schedule Maximizer solutions, including bi-directional integration with their Meditech system, with an efficient implementation plan to get them up and running quickly. The overarching goal was to eliminate the redundant and manual workflows for a streamlined, centralized patient access and care coordination process that would increase new business. At the same time, the new system would enable them to be performance-driven across key metrics for collections, accuracy, productivity and patient experience. Ultimately, the major functions of the new solution – fax indexing, electronic ordering by community provider offices, efficient worklists for schedulers and other staff, central order and scheduling status tracking, and closed-loop communication – supported their goal to improve patient and provider satisfaction.

SOLUTION PROVIDER NETWORK MANAGER™ AND SCHEDULE MAXIMIZER®

KEY OUTCOMES

- POS collections up 26% since 2015
- Denials due to lack of authorization down 5%
- Call duration down from 7 to 3 minutes with dramatically lower abandonment rates
- Lower no-show rates and more consistent rescheduling
- Moved 15 people off the phone to other tasks
- Training time for new schedulers down to weeks rather than months

Quick and easy scheduling at the most convenient and appropriate location



KEY FOCUS AREAS TO IMPROVE OVERALL PERFORMANCE AND ATTRACT BUSINESS

Eliminate paper-based workflows

The first big steps toward eliminating paper are electronic orders and worklists. Schedulers receive orders electronically and manage scheduling and authorization tasks using electronic worklists. Houston immediately eliminated the central paper folders, manual tracking forms, scanning and paper chasing. Now everyone can view orders and their status (scheduled, rescheduled, pending) in a central repository available to both the health system and provider offices. They have reorganized work processes to move 15 staff off the phones to other tasks, while call volumes, on-hold times and call abandonment rates declined.

Offer one number for inbound calls and proactively call out to patients

Patients and providers alike have one number to call for their scheduling needs. Just as important, with everything organized in worklists, schedulers call patients proactively to schedule appointments. The system features a sophisticated rules engine to guide even non-clinical schedulers through very complex clinical and operational procedures to book appointments quickly and accurately. Schedulers also verify patient demographics and provide preparation instructions, so patients have all the information they need before their appointment. Patients obtain information about travel, parking, etc., and have the chance to ask other questions. Lastly, patients receive appointment reminders via phone, text or email, which dramatically reduces no shows.

Move billing to front of the process

Once the appointment is scheduled, the precertification and authorization process starts right away using a specific worklist. The electronic process assures orders are complete by requiring appropriate ICD and CPT codes. All demographics are verified directly with the patient. At the same time, schedulers offer an estimate of the patient's out-of-pocket costs. Patients like this approach as April Ennis, Houston Radiology Manager and Clinical Physician Office Liaison, explains, "There's no sticker shock.

"Provider offices are calling us to ask when it's their turn to start using electronic orders."

– April Ennis, Radiology Manager
and Clinical Physician Office Liaison
Houston Healthcare

"Now we've given our community providers a reason to send patients to us... Offering this level of care coordination is unique in our market and has helped us gain business."

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Houston Healthcare

Patients appreciate knowing up front what their responsibility will be." Taking care of these tasks up front prevents denials and underpayments downstream and relieves pressure on the patient registration team as well. Patients simply review and sign paperwork upon arrival and proceed to their appointment.

Coordinate care using closed-loop communication

"Communication about care coordination was the number one reason we chose SCI," explains Ennis. "We needed a clear, open process so that providers feel confident about sending their patients to us." Electronic orders are coupled with convenient correspondence tools. If the scheduling department or the provider has questions, it's easier and faster than calling or faxing. Having status information in a central repository lets providers know that their patient has been scheduled or rescheduled, including the reason, without having to call to check. "Closing the communication loop has made a tremendous difference to providers and patients, especially with high-profile exams," adds Ennis.

Use data to continuously improve

Houston uses the Metrix Mart reporting and analytics tools extensively to manage and improve operations. Ennis says, "Metrix Mart has been very popular with our executives, including the CEO. They are very positive about the ability to watch up-to-date volumes and trends." Metrix Mart provides the ability to review information in a graph or table, plus the ability to drill down to detailed information.

With the right workflow capabilities, plus data and analytics tools in place, Houston meets or exceeds their key performance indicators month after month. They have a strong process in place to measure and report the following metrics:

- **Patient Experience:** Hold times, call durations, abandoned calls, wait times and patient surveys provide insight into what patients experience.
- **Collections:** Scheduling and registration staff measure point-of-service collections daily.
- **Accuracy:** Data accuracy is measured for procedure/test order and documentation, demographic and insurance information, and cost estimation and authorization.
- **Productivity:** Team productivity is measured by registered/scheduled patient rate per registrar/scheduler, total registrations completed, and appointments scheduled.

Better care coordination delivers value

According to Ennis, Houston has seen significant progress since their implementation. "We have seen a 20 percent increase in overall patient load – we're busier. Most important for us is that community providers were so frustrated by our process before. Now we've given them a reason to send patients to us. Provider offices are calling us to ask when it's their turn to start using electronic orders. Offering this level of care coordination is unique in our market and has helped us gain new business."

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"The rules engine quickly drives schedulers through the process correctly. Non-clinical schedulers don't have to make scheduling decisions or hold up the process to ask – it's all automated."

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