

“I am sorry I didn’t do it

10

years before.”

How Upper Chesapeake Health accelerated TAT, reduced backlog and enhanced care moving from in-house transcription to outsourcing with Spheris.

Spheris[®]

More complete solutions.

Upper Chesapeake Medical Center and Harford Memorial Hospital

250 beds

600 physicians on staff

6 million lines of transcription per year

Upper Chesapeake Health has provided comprehensive, high quality healthcare in Harford County, Maryland for more than 90 years. Two hospitals, Harford Memorial Hospital and Upper Chesapeake Medical Center, offer some of the area's most advanced inpatient and outpatient services. Upper Chesapeake is a community-based, non-profit health system.

Jane Gordon has spent her entire 33-year career at Upper Chesapeake Health and is currently Director of Health Information Management, a position she has held since 1987.

A growing hospital. A growing backlog. An aging dictation system. A constant struggle to balance in-house MT staff with workload. To better serve its patients, physicians and growth, Jane Gordon and Upper Chesapeake Health found results to grow on with Spheris.

“I was one of those people who was dead-set against outsourcing,” said Jane Gordon, speaking with 33 years of health information management experience behind her. “No one could give me comparable quality.”

Like many health information managers, Jane’s objective was to keep control of transcription quality through an in-house department. For many years this practice worked, but she admits it had some constant challenges.

“It’s difficult to manage with a small group of people when you can’t staff to the volume of work,” she said. “We couldn’t find the right complement of staff.”

When Jane had too few medical transcriptionists, work would quickly get backlogged. When she had too many on staff, there wasn’t enough work to go around and MTs would leave to find other jobs. Jane found herself in a cycle of constantly hiring or watching trained staff leave when workload slowed down.

The perfect storm.

In 2000, a series of events went into motion that put a “dangerous” strain on Upper Chesapeake Health’s approach to transcription and opened the dialog about looking at other options.

1. New hospital. More volume. One event was great news for Upper Chesapeake Health – the opening of Upper Chesapeake Medical Center to replace an aging facility. Almost immediately, UCH was seeing more patients and bringing on more doctors.

“We were growing in leaps and bounds,” Jane said. At one point they were bringing 10 to 15 new physicians to the medical executive committee every month.

Transcription volume was growing at the same time and quickly got ahead of her small department.

“We were struggling,” she said. “Senior management kept allowing me to add another person, add another

person, add another person. I was taking every available FTE just to keep up.”

In Jane’s mind, the situation was becoming “dangerously out of control.”

2. Outdated dictation system threatens to crash.

With transcription volume spiking, UCH’s old dictation system was sending out danger signals of its own. It was close to crashing.

“Nothing gave me more pain than this,” Jane said. “It was time to replace my dictation system. The proposal was close to half a million dollars – a capital expense.”

The increasing volume and creaking dictation system was keeping Jane in the office late into the evenings and on weekends.

“I was literally getting calls in the middle of the night,” she said.

3. Not enough MTs. Balancing her on-staff transcriptionists with volume had been a recurring problem. In the years before, her department had either too many or too few MTs. But with the new hospital, her eight-person department had almost tripled in size, but the backlog continued to grow.

Seeing that quality of care was in jeopardy, Jane understood that she had simply outgrown the in-house solution that had worked well for years. Yet, she still wanted to protect the MTs she had hired and trained.

An opportunity to improve performance.

According to Jane, when a hospital’s transcription and coding aren’t running smoothly, the entire organization feels it.

At a VHA conference in 2005, Upper Chesapeake Health’s director of performance improvement had a good conversation with VHA’s preferred transcription

provider – Spheris. Understanding the issues in Jane’s department, she passed along the contact, but added an important insight. “She told me that they were willing to hire our transcriptionists,” Jane recalls.

That put everything in motion. Three calls to three different Spheris references returned great feedback – especially from one larger health system. Spheris’ relationship with VHA provided a solid endorsement.

Making the transition a success.

Working with Spheris, Jane established critical priorities to handle both the immediate backlog and establish workflow with the needed TAT along with the quality expected from her own MTs.

1. Spheris dictation platform. Jane’s aging legacy dictation system was replaced with the more advanced technology of a Spheris platform. This saved the \$500,000 capital expense of a pure technology solution. As a side benefit, the Spheris platform had similar functionality to the previous system, so doctors still dialed the same number and entered similar keypad functions.

2. Transcription resources. All of Jane’s MT’s were offered positions with Spheris. Although not all accepted, Jane and her HR department felt that they had provided options to protect the interests of the staff.

“Spheris was very good to our MTs,” she said. As the Spheris solution went live, Spheris MTs started managing daily workload. A special Spheris team was assigned to take care of the backlog, working on “this old system that could crash at any minute.” The backlog was cleared up in eight weeks.

3. Partnership. More than anything Jane points to Spheris’ desire to work as a partner throughout the transition process.

“The take home lesson is this: I’m not going to tell you that there weren’t bumps in my road. There were bumps in my road. Whenever I had bumps in the road, they have had an answer. They have been by my side,” she said. Jane believes that her Spheris account manager is the individual that makes the partnership work.

“I have an account manager who works for me. His focus is the same as my focus and what’s best for the patients and the physicians in my organization,” Jane said.

With the inherent complexity of this kind of transition, Jane says that it’s unrealistic to expect that everything will go smoothly. However, she knows that her Spheris team is constantly doing everything it can to make things work, concentrating on her priorities, with “patient care as priority one.”

Results from the start.

As the Spheris solution went live, Upper Chesapeake Health started seeing almost instant improvement in turnaround times – their most important short-term objective.

1. Improved TAT. In measuring performance, Jane says her organization evaluates both threshold (getting the task accomplished) and goal (a “best case” standard). She says Spheris TAT always makes goal.

2. Consistent TAT. Rather than worrying about staffing levels affecting TAT, Jane has gained consistency. “My TATs are what they are regardless of the workflow. Spheris can handle it.”

3. “Ecstatic” doctors. Upper Chesapeake Health physicians are “ecstatic” that reports are there when they need them. Physicians depend on transcription. Reliable transcription really enhances their work process. Jane pointed to her account manager who “spent time on the floor, hanging out at nurses’ stations,

looking for doctors.” He was able to provide quick one-on-one sessions to get physicians comfortable with the new solution.

Jane also appreciates getting her life back and being able to concentrate on the full scope of her responsibilities as Director of Health Information Management.

33 years of advice.

Talking about outsourcing her transcription, Jane noted: “I am sorry I didn’t do it 10 years ago. It’s absolutely the best decision I’ve made in 10 years.”

She is equally candid in talking about how to evaluate transcription companies.

“Don’t talk to people who come in talking about your bottom line first. Talk to people who are concerned about your patients,” she emphasized.

“We’re not dealing with widgets. It’s healthcare. Spheris is a patient-focused organization.”

Spheris serves more than 500 health systems, hospitals and group practices throughout the U.S. Like Upper Chesapeake Health, each has its own unique needs and story. Spheris works in partnership with each organization to provide complete solutions that blend technology with workflow management, a global network of transcriptionists and metrics-driven service. All to streamline the flow of critical information and enhance patient care.

For more information, call 1.800.513.7864 or visit www.spheris.com

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