Making the Back Office Pay
Measuring and increasing productivity while reducing costs

The relationship revolution has put the patient in charge of the conversation. Patients don’t care whether their requests and issues are handled by someone in a healthcare contact center or a back office. They simply want problems solved as quickly and accurately as humanly possible – with the help of all available technology. And when technology and process fail to produce results, issues can quickly spread through social networks, forums, blogs, communities and the electronic venues others look to for advice on what healthcare systems to use – and which ones to avoid.

While the machinations within the back office should be invisible to the patient, supervisors and managers should have a clear and detailed view into how back office resources are meeting patient expectations. After all, if healthcare contact center operations are effective but the back office is slow to respond, patient experience suffers. Patients may not see very far beyond their healthcare contact center interactions, but the quality of their experiences is indirectly influenced by the effectiveness of back-office employees’ performance. In a survey of healthcare contact center decision makers, 42% say that they are unable to effectively manage the end-to-end workflow of interactions.¹

Inefficiencies in the back office drive up costs on several levels. There’s the risk of patient attrition – and lost opportunities – when patients become disgruntled by insurance claim processing delays, appointment scheduling errors and other miscues that originate downstream. And suboptimal staffing, the most significant financial drain, results from the inability to forecast, schedule and track both the number and qualifications of employees required to effectively run a back office.

The Front End Gains of a Productive Back Office
When providers optimize back-office systems, processes, and ultimately employees’ performance, the benefits carry over to patient interactions. By better aligning back-office employees to patient engagement requests, healthcare systems can relieve the healthcare contact center of a significant percentage of call volume and the associated costs, and also contribute to a better patient experience.

Studies support the bottom-line advantage of the links between back-office efficiencies and both patient satisfaction and loyalty. McKinsey reports that improving back-office efficiency and effectiveness from average- to top-quartile levels can increase healthcare system’s net margin by two percentage points.²

Improved Staff Utilization through Predictive Analysis
A solution that offers full workforce optimization capabilities – including workforce management, performance management and quality management – equips healthcare systems to improve strategic planning by scheduling and maintaining both the right number and types of back-office employees. Scheduling analysts can experiment to find the staffing scenario that best accommodates planned or unplanned events. By using automated analytics to test different scenarios, they’re able to easily manipulate the variables to determine the optimal staff and resource configuration for meeting a specific set of business needs.

One challenge of balancing staff with patient demands is the variation in response times for different types of work. When tasks, such as insurance claims processing, prescription order fulfillment, and other back-office activities are completed at multiple sites or outsourced locations, solving this equation becomes even more complex. With the ongoing need to be agile in the face of both predictable and unexpected staffing changes, flexible forecasting and scheduling capabilities – as well as intraday performance evaluation and schedule tracking – are invaluable for attaining optimal efficiency and effectiveness.

When optimal schedules are combined with capabilities to distribute tasks according to business need, employee skill and employee availability – and can take into account the desired service levels – the back office becomes a powerful engine for patient experience.

¹ The Next-Generation Contact Center, Forrester/Aspect, October 2012
Continuous Employee Performance Improvement

Maintaining the right number and types of workers to service the healthcare system is just the starting point for effective workforce optimization. Focused performance management and coaching will help you align employees to key goals. Automated capabilities allow managers and supervisors to more accurately plan, evaluate and manage not only the performance of back-office employees, but also the workers who service both the healthcare contact center and the back office.

A worker’s productivity level can be measured and reported, including the number and duration of tasks handled as well as the amount of time spent in productive versus unproductive activities. Dashboards and other reports compare outcomes to targeted values for key performance indicators. When results fall below preset thresholds, automated alerts can prompt supervisors and initiate online coaching that provides remedial instruction. Pre-defined coaching specific to each learning need provides immediate, consistent guidance, which is reinforced by a performance improvement plan that tracks the time and effectiveness of completion.

Capabilities for evaluating employees’ performance can also empower them. High-performing workers may be given the option to bid on preferred shifts and request schedule changes within selected parameters, helping to raise morale and increase retention. The benefits to your healthcare system are reduced administrative costs and increased efficiency that come with automated schedule changes and notices via email and screen pops. In addition, tools that allow managers to monitor real-time and historical schedule adherence, and track actual to targeted employee performance with performance scorecards, provide insightful feedback that helps you get the best return on their staffing decisions.

Ultimately, overall performance can be more closely aligned with business goals, and back-office employees and other workers are individually empowered to achieve specific objectives in support of these goals.

A Closer Look at Employee and Operational Performance

Process analytics and task management technology allows healthcare systems to keep track of employee productivity and task performance, and adjust resources and tasks to meet service goals. Many businesses face challenges measuring the duration of certain back-office tasks and have little information on process flow and employee productivity. With an ability to interface with operational workflow and BPM (Business Process Management) environments, or apply desktop analytics to capture desktop activity, the tools for getting a granular view into how employees actually perform against the objectives set are now possible.
Conclusion

Back office optimization solutions – when backed by sophisticated workforce optimization capabilities – can increase the productivity of back-office operations and decrease costs. Specifically, they help to improve patient service levels while decreasing required staffing through predictive modeling. These solutions also empower and improve employees’ performance through automated coaching and by allowing them to manage their own schedules using pre-defined rules. Finally, detailed process and employee productivity insights may be gathered through screen analytics.

The ultimate reward is consistently quicker, more accurate response to customer queries. Healthcare systems are able to cultivate loyalty through long-term satisfaction – without adding resources or budget.