

# Clinical Documentation Improvement (CDI) Health System Regulation

## CASE STUDY - SwedishAmerican Hospital

### FOCUS AREA: Clinical Documentation Integrity (CDI)

#### Situation

SwedishAmerican Hospital (Swedish), a 333-bed, full-service, nonprofit hospital located in Rockford, Illinois, provides over forty different specialties, as well as outpatient, wellness, and education programs, to the greater Rockford region, northern Illinois, and southern Wisconsin. Leadership wanted to ensure that the hospital's clinical documentation integrity (CDI) program, which had been in place for several years, performed at best practice standards. The organization collaborated with BRG's CDI experts to evaluate and revitalize Swedish's program.

#### Solution

BRG professionals launched a comprehensive review of Swedish's CDI program and implemented improvements to capture missed opportunities for complete and accurate physician documentation and to improve severity of illness (SOI) and risk of mortality (ROM) scores. The effort centered on education for clinical documentation specialists (CDSs), coding professionals, and physicians; performance development; process improvement; and monitoring metrics.

#### Education

BRG kicked off the engagement with a seven-week, in-depth classroom education program that included both CDSs and coders, creating critical collaboration between the two previously disparate groups. BRG's team also provided one-to-one shadowing, mentoring, and daily chart reviews to the CDSs.

BRG developed an education program for the hospitalist physician group to improve query responses. Partnering with the lead hospitalist, BRG held a series of education sessions with the entire physician group, focusing on query response improvement and how minor adjustments can have significant impact on accurate SOI and ROM.

#### Team Structure and Performance

BRG developed clear expectations for CDS productivity to ensure all team members achieved best practice performance. This led to improving the CDI chart review rate from 43.9 percent to 98.2 percent, far surpassing the best-practice rate of 80 percent. BRG also assisted on restructuring the team after two CDSs retired and a new CDS was hired.

#### Process Improvement

Throughout the engagement, BRG professionals conducted daily chart reviews, reconciliation reviews, and targeted diagnosis related-group (DRG) reviews for quality and completeness of CDI reviews, quality and appropriateness of queries, and missed query opportunities. BRG provided real-time feedback and recommendations for improvement.

BRG also created and implemented a CDI/coder reconciliation plan, fostering cooperation and collaboration between CDSs and coders. The plan included scheduled joint-learning opportunities and processes that encouraged two-way communication between the CDSs and coders. The program later expanded to include reconciliation of both Medicare Severity-Diagnosis Related Group (MS-DRG) and All Patient Refined (APR) cases (Illinois Medicaid).



***“BRG’s hands-on approach to CDI education and mentoring, collaboration with coding, and physician education ensured leading practices are ingrained in Swedes’ CDI program, driving more accurate reimbursement and quality metrics and positioning our organization for long-term success.”***

**- Patti Dewane,**  
Chief Financial Officer  
and Treasurer  
SwedishAmerican, A  
Division of UW Health

## Metrics and Monitoring

BRG established metrics to understand the impact and organizational benefit of the CDI program, including analysis of MS-DRG query rate, APR (Medicaid) query rate, total coverage rate, physician response rate, and physician agreed rate, as well as providing analysis of how each section was impacted financially. In addition, the DRG reconciliation process between CDS and Coding was fostered and monitored closely, and the financial benefit calculated.

To ensure sustainability of the improvements, BRG coordinated with the CDI manager to assign team roles and accountability measures for the new processes.

## Results

Swedish's revitalized CDI program has exceeded all projected metrics, including coverage rate, query rate, and meaningful physician response rate:

- **Coverage** rate increase: 124%
- **Physician** impactful response rate increase: 35%
- **Improvement** in CMI: 12% (1.41 to 1.58)
- **Improvement** in SOI: 18% (1.95 to 2.30)
- **Improvement** in ROM: 24% (1.70 to 2.10)

In just a few months, Swedish surpassed the goal of 92 percent physician query response rate. Successful physician education and engagement also led to a decrease in the overall CDI query rate; as physicians improved their initial documentation, fewer queries were needed to capture the complete record of care delivered.

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## Critical Success Factor: Physician Engagement

Physician engagement was critical to the success of SwedishAmerican's CDI program revitalization. From the outset of the engagement, BRG worked with a physician leader who became a driving force behind building physician consensus, maintaining accountability, and sustaining results. Customized physician education also was a key component of the program refresh, including:

- **Four** education sessions that explained the value of CDI, the physicians' role in the program, and CDI's impact on the hospital's financial and quality metrics
- **Real-world** chart reviews with recommendations for improvement to reflect true SOI and ROM
- **Monitoring** physician query responses and intervening with individuals, as needed

## About BRG Healthcare Performance Improvement

BRG was recently ranked the seventh largest healthcare management consulting firm by Modern Healthcare.

BRG's Healthcare Performance Improvement team works with healthcare providers around the country to help improve margins and enhance clinical and operational performance across the care continuum. We combine comprehensive expertise, experience, and analytics to deliver data-driven, innovative approaches to help hospitals, health systems, academic medical centers, and other providers tackle their most complex challenges.



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