



Case Study



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Developer Relationship Integral to Combined EMR-Practice Management System

Ulrich Medical Concepts' flagship product, a complete electronic medical record and practice management system, uses Alpha II software to integrate clean coding, clean claims functionality

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At Ulrich Medical Concepts, it's all about being seamless. "Our whole focus is the integration, in eliminating the need to re-enter demographics or patient information," says Sandra Ulrich, chief operating officer. "We absolutely abhor duplicate data entry."

Ulrich Medical, founded in 1999 in Paducah, Kentucky, has put this commitment to usability on display in its flagship solution, a combined scheduling, billing and electronic medical record (EMR) system called Team Chart Concept (TCC). Designed for instant access to patient information, TCC offers a fully-integrated, turnkey practice management and EMR option for practices of all sizes.

A Coding Opportunity

Ulrich Medical's client base now extends across eight states, ranging from Ohio and West Virginia to Tennessee and Missouri. As TCC grew in popularity, the management team began to notice many clients simply lacked the billing expertise to consistently generate clean claims. Unfortunately, that became Ulrich Medical's problem as well.

"Our support staff was inundated with calls relating to billing and coding," recalls Ulrich. "And it was really beginning to take its toll in terms of our staff resources. This problem clearly showed us that there was a need for coding tools, and we had to take action before it escalated further."

Ulrich Medical saw an opportunity to improve coding accuracy, clean claims rates, and cash flow for these smaller, primarily rural medical practices. But it knew it would need to find a partner with coding expertise, an extensive claims database and the flexibility to integrate the technology fully within TCC.

In the latter part of 2005, Ulrich Medical began to focus specifically on the challenge of improving charge entry. The company was already aware of the Alpha II software developer's toolkit, CodeWizard. Ulrich Medical independently investigated the experience of other Alpha II clients in addition to researching other options. Ulrich and her colleagues found that competitive products lacked CodeWizard's comprehensive set of tools and ability to integrate with TCC. Ulrich Medical ultimately chose Alpha II as the best way to seamlessly incorporate the functionality it sought: the ability to review and correct codes in real-time, as the physician documents an encounter within TCC.

Introducing SmartCoder

Ulrich Medical used CodeWizard to fully integrate charge entry editing features, private labeling it as SmartCoder to complement other features the company had already developed internally, such as SmartTicket and SmartChart.

With SmartCoder, Ulrich Medical clients have the ability to initiate the system's functionality, simply by clicking the "Edit Encounter" button within TCC. A physician may then either review and correct codes as he or she documents the encounter, or defer to the staff for the more complicated billing edits.

The features and functions available through SmartCoder now include code search and code assignment guidance. In addition, the system's editing ability encompasses all of the following: CCI bundling, LMRP/LCD/NCD, proprietary medical necessity, modifier, ultimate specificity and front-end technical edits.

"Alpha II has been great to work with," says Matt Wurth, a software developer at Ulrich Medical. "Our contacts there have been responsive to all of our technical questions, and we have been very impressed by the staff's ongoing support for CodeWizard."

Results that Matter

"SmartCoder has been extremely successful," states Ulrich. "Our clients love it. Since so many of them can't afford to hire an expert coder, this is the solution that fills the gap. Even for practices with coders, it's a wonderful tool for them to have at their fingertips."

Introduced at the Ulrich Medical users' conference in January 2006, Ulrich estimates that 80 percent of the TCC client base now uses SmartCoder, including all customers that implemented TCC after the launch of SmartCoder. It has not been a tough sell to the company's clients. "SmartCoder was the star of that conference. When we explain the functionality of the product, billing staff managers' eyes usually get pretty big," recalls Ulrich. "And today's doctors understand the importance of clean claims. We've never had a problem collecting subscription fees for SmartCoder, which tells you a lot right there."

Ulrich Medical's clearinghouse partner recognizes organizations that achieve a clean claims rate of 99 percent. Since offering SmartCoder, the percentage of Ulrich Medical clients reaching that benchmark has more than quadrupled. "Given that the industry average cost of filing a claim is \$8 dollars, that represents a huge boost in cash flow for our customers," says Ulrich.

As yet another benefit, Ulrich Medical clients save money on licensing fees for the use of and updates to ICD-9, CPT¹ and HCPCS code sets. Due to the way Alpha II and CodeWizard handle these, the fees are now built in. That's a hard cost reduction for TCC users and a reduced hassle factor for Ulrich Medical.

Beyond Software Integration

Revenue Solutions, Ulrich Medical's sister company, also uses SmartCoder to support its billing services and accounts receivables management. The company began operations in early 2007, offering its clients an EMR solution with SmartCoder at no up-front cost. Revenue Solutions simply collects its fees as a portion of the revenues collected.

Ulrich Medical and Revenue Solutions' collaboration with Alpha II has gone so well that TCC will undergo another major enhancement, ambitiously targeted for completion by the end of 2007. This feature will integrate Alpha II's ClaimStaker functionality for payer-specific claims scrubbing. "This is a knowledge base and technology that our clients have never had access to before, and it will take our clean claims efforts to another level," predicts Ulrich. "I'm confident that our clients' denials and rejections will drop even further."

Team Chart Concept is now "powered by Alpha II," a tightly integrated and integral component to Ulrich Medical's complete electronic medical record and practice management solution.

"It wasn't really feasible to develop the ability to check payer rules in-house," says Wurth. "Why reinvent the wheel? Alpha II allowed us to get up-to-speed more quickly, and through this process, we have developed a great relationship that continues to grow."

¹CPT® is a registered trademark of the American Medical Association.