

How Technology Is Streamlining Home Health Utilization Management

Delivering quality patient care is the ultimate goal of post-acute care (PAC) providers. But to provide that care — and get reimbursed for it — they need to go through the process of utilization management. It helps payers determine whether patient services are efficient, appropriate, and medically necessary.

Traditionally, prior authorization reviews are time consuming. They can delay care, frustrate the care team, and foster anxiety in patients. But Helion continues to streamline utilization management for home health providers through its utilization management portal, called the Helion Portal.

A data-driven solution for prior authorizations

To simplify the prior authorization process for home health providers, Helion relies on information that providers already have on hand. Industry standards require home health providers to create a plan of care and collect OASIS (Outcome and Assessment Information Set)* data for each patient. The Helion Portal uses that data for prior authorizations.

“We start with data already captured at the point of care,” says Sean Hunt, director of Product and Technology Solutions at Helion. “Then we glean insights from the data to help guide the experience for that patient and offer automated determinations whenever possible.”

Providers upload each patient’s plan of care and OASIS data into the portal and submit their prior authorization requests electronically (instead of by fax or phone). Those steps give Highmark Blue Shield the information it needs to either approve or decline those requests immediately.

Benefits for utilization management and beyond

Advanced Home Health and Hospice, located in Allegheny County, began using the Helion Portal in 2016, when it was first launched. According to Richard Griffin, CEO and co-owner of Advanced Home Health and Hospice, the portal builds an interactive process around each patient’s care. It offers an immediate determination for prior authorizations, but also delivers an understanding of what’s been going on with the patient historically and identifies care opportunities.

“When we get information in an expedited fashion and have certainty about authorizations, it allows us to put together care plans, have conversations, and provide appropriate resources,” says Griffin. “At the end of the day, we’re doing this because we care about taking care of people. When we can get valuable information that helps us do that better, it’s tremendous.”

For Advanced Home Health and Hospice, the benefits of using the Helion Portal include:

Minimized administrative burden

Before the Helion Portal, prior authorization requests for Highmark Blue Shield required providers to fill out forms, provide narrative information, and upload patient charts. The process could take 30-45 minutes per submission. Through the portal's use of structured data, Hunt says that submission time is now under 10 minutes on average — and, in many cases, under two minutes.

But submission is only half of the battle. According to Griffin, prior to the portal, getting an authorization back took a week. Now they receive an instant automated determination unless additional patient information is needed. “The Helion Portal has significantly streamlined that process,” he says. “It provides us with some certainty right away and allows us to put together care plans and continuums of care that are appropriate for people.”

Triggers for patient interventions

With so much structured data and patient information, Helion can create predictive models for patient care and interventions. For example, the data may show that a female member with a hip fracture could benefit from some type of treatment around osteoporosis. The Helion Portal may trigger her clinician to consider recommending a bone mineral density scan for that patient.

“Having that trigger or extra ping come across has been infinitely valuable,” Griffin says. “We look at a lot of information and do a lot of assessments. But it’s nice to have that extra support that triggers us to take action.”

According to Hunt, these triggers benefit the payer too. They offer an opportunity to be collaborative when a member might benefit from additional interventions.

“We look at home health providers as an extension of the health plan,” Hunt says. “They build relationships with our patients and often become a trusted part of their extended caregiver family. Through the triggers, we equip them with information about potential interventions that might be impactful for our patients at the point of care.”

An episodic approach to patient care

When considering prior authorizations, the Helion Portal uses structured data to look holistically at a patient's entire episode. Whenever possible, the portal determines the total number of appropriate visits that should be provided to meet an individual's needs.

Instead of having to come back every week or two to ask for more visits, providers have approval for the complete episode. Clinicians and their patients know how many total visits they are working with and can set goals accordingly.

“This approach lets clinicians shine,” Hunt says. “It enables them to have an adequate number of resources at their disposal to individualize care for that member. It also gives members a better idea of what to expect when they are receiving care at home.”

Enhancing utilization management for home health providers

Helion continues to advance the Helion Portal to reflect the needs of providers and members. New and upcoming enhancements include:

- **Performance analytics:** Providers can gain deeper insight into which patients are driving their metrics, both positively and negatively, using this recently launched portal tool. Helion then helps providers recognize and deploy strategies for improvement.
- **Secure messaging:** This new portal feature will allow a team of people at a home health agency to receive, create, and respond to messages from any number of teams at the health plan. It will eliminate the need for phone calls and provide an instant connection to the appropriate resource. Expect secure messaging to go live later this year.

To learn more about the benefits and features of the Helion Portal, contact Sean Hunt, director of Product and Technology Solutions at Helion: Sean.W.Hunt@helionhealthcare.com.

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