

Success snapshot

Regional One amplifies utilization review effectiveness with Optum Case Advisor

Like many hospitals, Regional One Health's utilization review department struggled to deliver on its expanded scope of responsibilities. "Our staff was working overtime and spending 10 hours each day just to complete the census," says Sandra McClairen, director of inpatient access services.

Much of that workload consisted of time-consuming first-level patient status reviews. "We'd have to dig through several sets of documentation for each encounter," explains Ms. McClairen. First-level criteria gave some direction but was very subjective. "You could find a way to make every case meet inpatient criteria, but that flexibility was a weakness. We needed something definitive to convince our treating physicians of a different patient status."

Judy Briggs, vice president of revenue cycle, says, "We were losing money because we didn't have a consistent, objective process." Ms. McClairen adds, "You miss revenue when you do everything manually. If that happens on a high-dollar patient, it costs the hospital an enormous amount of money."

They needed a better solution. Having an established relationship with Optum, they turned to Optum® Case Advisor to address their utilization review (UR) needs.

A helping hand for utilization review

Regional One leveraged Case Advisor to automatically sort cases by patient status likelihood – also known as initial case stratification – and serve up the key medical facts in seconds for UR. "In the past, we worked whatever case was next. Now, we have a birds-eye view of the entire census, and the case stratification score lets us prioritize what to review," explains Ms. Briggs. "We can focus on the gray cases rather than waste time on low-score cases that are clearly outpatient. Because Case Advisor constantly updates the score as new documentation is added, it avoids long continued-stay reviews." Ms. McClairen says utilization review can act more proactively. "Before, the patient was already in a bed by the time we'd get a chance to review their case. Now, we make patient status decisions upfront."

"Case Advisor has helped me get my staff home on time. It lets me redeploy staff because of vacations, and even during the upheaval of COVID-19," says Ms. McClairen. "I haven't had to ask for more staff. We're easily managing our workload now." She also sees Case Advisor as an effective recruiting tool. "It's easier to hire new utilization review nurses when they know we'll get them home on time."

Regional One Health

- **337-bed** teaching hospital in Memphis, Tennessee, serving a four-state region
- **Elvis Presley Trauma Center:** the only Level 1 trauma center in the Mid-South
- **Firefighters Burn Center:** the only burn center in a four-state region verified by the American Burn Association and American College of Surgeons



The solution

Optum® Case Advisor is a utilization review technology featuring:

- **Clinically intelligent** artificial intelligence (AI), including machine learning and natural language processing (NLP)
- **Continuous** case-sorting by patient status likelihood
- **AI-powered** physician advisor reviews
- **Vast foundation** of curated, supporting medical research

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Regional One has streamlined first-level reviews so extensively that the utilization review team can make greater contributions to other priorities. “We now support our point-of-entry team in their escalation efforts. Our pre-cert team has only two people and can get bogged down with trauma cases. Now, we help them, too,” explains Ms. McClairen. “We’re spending much more time on discharge planning and patient care and less time on administrative work.”



Improvements to observation rate and peer-to-peer success

Ms. McClairen was initially skeptical about Case Advisor. “I was hesitant about the scoring, since it was based on information extracted from the patient record. Providers don’t document very well.” Seeing the technology in action changed her mind. “Case Advisor isn’t a word search. It draws in risk factors and other things that make it much more accurate. Once I saw its accuracy and ease of use, then I really bought in.”

Regional One can also use its internal physician advisor (PA) more judiciously. “Prior to Case Advisor, we would overwhelm our internal physicians with questions. Now, Case Advisor identifies the high-risk factors, low-risk factors and key medical facts that allow my case managers to go directly to the treating physicians. It saves a lot of time,” explains Ms. McClairen. “Optum also includes access to their remote PAs, which really helps on nights, weekends and when our internal PA wants a second opinion. Turnaround is very quick.”

The results speak for themselves. In the first six months of using Case Advisor, Regional One’s observation rate decreased by 14%. The hospital has also improved its overturn rate for denials of inpatient admissions. “For one particular payer, we used to never win our peer-to-peer reviews. We won the first three cases we put through Case Advisor. The scoring, the key risk factors and the evidence-based research citations all made for a much stronger case,” she explains. “It was amazing. I was the hardest sell on the team, but after seeing the results, all my doubts went out the window.”

Better quality interactions with treating physicians

Utilization Review has also improved its relationship with treating physicians. “Some treating physicians were resistant. They didn’t want us telling them how to care for their patients,” Ms. McClairen says. “Historically, we’d have a lot of subjective arguments, and no one would agree. Case Advisor helped us erase that resistance. Now, we’re raising points based on their documentation and the evidence, not first-level criteria that’s open to interpretation. Our attendings ask what the case stratification score is and review the risk factors. It isn’t about what the payer or the UR team said, but rather about the score.”

This improvement is particularly important given the hospital’s pedigree. “We’re a teaching hospital. A lot of initial orders are placed by a resident, and sometimes we have to escalate to the attending physician,” Ms. McClairen says. “Case Advisor gives us the objective basis to guide those conversations.”

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I would recommend Optum Case Advisor to any peer struggling with workload or the complexity of inpatient status decisions. Medical necessity gets muddy. Case Advisor is designed for medical necessity and gives us what we need to make the case with our payers.

Sandra McClairen

Director of Inpatient Access Services

Learn how Case Advisor can help you achieve similar success.



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