

CASE STUDY:

UCHealth

12-hospital system + 3 affiliates | Operating in 3 states | Epic EMR

CHALLENGE

Manual processes for authorization consistently maxed out staff capacity, requiring continuous addition of new FTEs to support system growth.

SOLUTIONS

Prior Authorization Suite

- Auth Initiate
- Auth Status

RESULTS

- Saved up to \$720,000 in FTE salaries
- Improved speed of prior authorization by 340%
- Increased automation rate by 42% in six months
- Decreased denials related to authorizations by 46%
- Significantly decreased 'no authorization' write-offs

With 15 hospitals in three states and almost four million patient visits per year, UCHealth needed to transform its processes for financial clearance and prior authorization in preparation for its next phase of growth. Manual, high-touch payer interactions, lack of payer authorization rules, and decentralized processes continued to negatively affect staff capacity, wasting up to 70% of staff time. This led to a near-constant need to hire more employees, higher-than-necessary delays in securing authorization and increased denials and write-offs.

With well-defined objectives to improve staff efficiency, and on-board new facilities without unnecessary staff augmentation, UCHealth leaders selected Waystar's Prior Authorization Suite to more intelligently automate and centralize the authorization process. UCHealth leaders found the ideal solution with two key authorization modules: (1) Auth Initiate, which automates the submission request of authorization, and (2) Auth Status, which automatically checks and retrieves the status of an auth and integrates the result and necessary details like authorization numbers and effective date ranges into Epic to drive workflow. By automating the authorization clearance process with Waystar's single, end-to-end platform, UCHealth increased the prior authorization days-out working window from two and a half to nine days out, decreased related denials by 46% and achieved substantial labor savings by eliminating the need to continually add more FTEs. This resulted in UCHealth's ability to onboard 11 primary clinics, 67 specialty clinics, two new hospitals, and one ASC, with no added headcount.

Why Waystar

With goals to automate 60% of their accounts, decrease denials by 30% and improve service times by securing authorizations faster, UCHealth chose Waystar for its uniquely comprehensive ability to meet every objective – all on a single platform that integrates seamlessly with their Epic EHR.

“Previously, 60-70% of staff time was manually following up on pending accounts. Now the vast majority are auto-statused, so staff can spend that time submitting new accounts instead.”

Kerre Valtierra, Senior Director of Operations for Patient Line, Ambulatory Referral and Authorization, UCHealth

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Auth Initiate and Auth Status – two key modules within the Waystar Prior Authorization Suite – deliver an integrated Epic workflow, which keeps the user in Epic as much as possible. Once an order is placed, service is scheduled and a 278 message is generated, the Waystar system searches the payer's pre-certification list to determine authorization requirements. Based on that automated query, it will either authorize and remove the order from the Epic work queue, or if submission is needed, it remains in queue for Auth Initiate.

Powered by artificial intelligence, Auth Initiate uses robotic processes to self-navigate the payer's website, enter the required authorization data and submit the authorization. For all pending accounts, Auth Status checks the payer status for UCHealth until the payer determination is complete, automatically publishing the authorization details directly into the EHR.

"Waystar does a great job of proactively scouring payer portals and pre-certification lists," Valtierra explains. "Anytime there's an update, it gets put into their system, so we are constantly using the correct information."

Powerful results and benefits

Since go-live, UCHealth has met or exceeded all its established goals. Within the first six months, their automation rate increased by 42%, and within one year, more than 60% of authorizations were obtained automatically. As a result, UCHealth was able to see its days-out working window expand from about two and half days to nine days out -- a 3.4x improvement. Automation has decreased denials related to authorizations by 46%. As Brent Rikhoff, Director of Pre-Access at UCHealth, explains: "When we started this project, our 'no authorization' write-offs made up about 0.5% of total write-offs in our organization – we decreased that down to 0.1% post-implementation."

By substantially reducing the amount of staff intervention required for prior authorization, UCHealth has also been able to reallocate 13-15 FTEs to activities that support health system growth, saving an estimated \$624,000-\$720,000 in projected new FTE salary costs in the first fiscal year alone. As a result, Rikhoff says UCHealth has onboarded 11 primary clinics, 67 specialty clinics, two hospitals and one surgery center without adding any new FTEs.

"Definitely, we saw good denials results ... our Waystar solution played a big part in decreasing those numbers. One of the reasons this has been a success is because we have a very engaged Waystar team."

Brent Rikhoff, Director of Insurance Verification and Authorization, UCHealth

"Our journey started with finding a vendor that checked all the boxes from our product must-haves category – and that's how we came to partner with Waystar."

Kerre Valtierra, Senior Director of Operations for Patient Line, Ambulatory Referral and Authorization, UCHealth

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ABOUT WAYSTAR

Waystar simplifies and unifies healthcare payments with innovative, cloud-based technology. Together, our technology, data and client support streamline workflows and improve financials for our clients, so they can focus on their patients.