



Benefits of an Automated Affiliation Response System

By Mary A. Hicks, CPCS, CPMSM, Immediate Past President, NHAMSS

Portsmouth Regional Hospital is an acute care community hospital with about 370 providers on staff. At the time we were doing manual affiliate response letters, our MSO was staffed with 1.75 full-time employees (FTEs). The 0.75 was held by two part-time workers who “shared” the position.

We were always aware that the affiliate response letters used a large block of our time, and we became more aware of this when we began responding to requests only on Fridays, unless there was an urgent need. Although we had an automated system for printing out letters from our credentialing software, it was taking from four to six hours each Friday to print the letters, fax them to the requesting facility and then file them. At times it would take several attempts to fax a letter, followed up by a phone call to verify we had the correct fax number. This process was frustrating, because we had already instituted every time-saving device we could to make it as efficient as possible.

In January 2011, we switched to new credentialing software that had a function for automated on-line responses that the requesting affiliation printed directly. We customized our response letter, and using a function within the database indicated providers who would not have a letter of good standing print when requested. Instead, the requesting institution would get the message to “call medical staff services at xxx-xxx-xxxx.” The message does not indicate the reason for the call, which is helpful because there are times when it simply means we neglected to turn on the letter. Since 2011, when we receive a request for a letter we simply fax back a one-page instruction sheet. Eventually, institutions that request larger volumes of letters from us stop sending the requests and just run the letters automatically. The volume of requests we receive has dropped dramatically, and when we must send the instructions it takes less than a minute. We return the cover sheet along with the instructions. To be most efficient, we

keep our instructions right next to the fax machine, and when we pick up a request we drop the response right back in.

When doing a cost-benefit analysis for an online response system, take into account not just the time your staff spends on the letters, but also the time it takes to mail and/or fax responses, the time to file the hard copies, and the expense of the paper, ink, postage or phone bill. If your organization has a goal of going green this process aligns perfectly due to the reduction in paper and ink. One more benefit is the saving of space to store the letters in your filing system if you have paper files.

If you choose to implement an online response system, I have no doubt your staff will respond much as mine: “Why didn’t we do this sooner?” The large block of time formerly spent on processing paperwork is now put to better use in analyzing applications and working on projects that add more value to our institution. ■

Automate Affiliation Responses with the NAMSS PASS™

By Constance E Riedel, BS, CPMSM, CPCS, NAMSS Immediate Past President and NAMSS PASS Task Force Chair

I am sure many of you, who like Portsmouth Regional Hospital, have implemented an automated affiliation response system and have realized the tremendous cost and time savings it can bring.

The director of a CVO for a large 15-hospital system has estimated that they spent an average of 15 minutes to respond to each affiliation request. This includes the handling of the letter (opening and reading), researching the practitioner's information, producing the response letter from a credentialing system, folding and/or stuffing the envelope and mailing. In a lower volume hospital, the time per letter could be greater, because there is less benefit from economies of scale.



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Let's assume the average hourly cost of the medical staff specialist responding to the request is \$24/hour not including benefits. Utilizing the 15-minute average cited above, the cost of responding to just one affiliation request is anywhere between \$7 to \$8 when factoring in staff time, postage and letterhead. In a situation where a medical staff office receives 100 affiliation requests per month, that is a cost of \$700 to \$800 per month.

You can now automate your affiliation responses absolutely FREE with the NAMSS PASS™. There is no cost to create an account or upload your data, meaning you could see instant savings. Setting up your account is simple and maintaining it is a matter of minutes a month. NAMSS has even provided an auto response letter with instructions on how others can access your practitioner affiliation history through the NAMSS PASS™, so now responses

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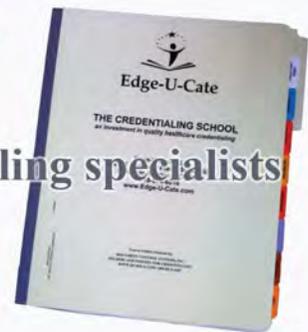
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are as simple as faxing or emailing these instructions to querying entities.

Cost and time savings in responding to affiliation requests is just one benefit of the NAMSS PASS™. Now think of the time spent verifying a practitioner's affiliation through another facility. Not only is there a cost to review the practitioner's application carefully, query the listed affiliations and wait for responses with often second and third requests, there is also a tremendous cost in lost revenue for each day a practitioner is waiting to be credentialed. The same 15-hospital system has estimated that it often took a week for a response to faxed affiliation requests from facilities that did not have web-based systems. As we all know, verification of a practitioner's affiliations is often the last verification we receive and could easily lead to a month's delay in getting a practitioner approved and in practice due to the timing of the necessary meetings for the approval process.

The director of a CVO for a large 15-hospital system has estimated that they spent an average of 15 minutes to respond to each affiliation request.

The NAMSS PASS™ allows you or your staff to immediately print good standing letters on the contributing hospital letterhead, if a letter for that practitioner is available. That means no more faxing requests for affiliation verification and no more waiting for responses. At only \$3 per letter (there are even greater savings when you sign up for subscription services) to print affiliation letters instantly, think of the potential savings (in terms of reducing lost revenue) by credentialing your practitioners faster.

For facilities who already have implemented an auto response system, we encourage you

to still use that system and also upload your data into the NAMSS PASS™. The transition to NAMSS PASS™ will be easy and we will be working with vendors to make that happen. Far greater than the cost savings is the opportunity to increase patient safety by creating a comprehensive gap analysis of all practitioners' affiliations utilizing one resource. Just imagine if you had access to a complete affiliation history and gap analysis for the practitioners you credential and you could easily identify any red flags. Help NAMSS raise the bar in patient safety. ■

NAMSS would like to recognize the following NAMSS PASS™ Participants:

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| Eastern Long Island Hospital | Mercy Hospital Springfield | Tomball Regional Medical Center |
| Elliot Hospital – Manchester, NH | Mercy Willard Hospital | TRMC |
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