

**SUNY Downstate Medical Center  
Brooklyn, NY**

**A Medical Records Department's Clean-Up Efforts Contribute to Hospital's Overall Excellent Rating**

The Medical Records Department of the State University of New York's (SUNY) Downstate Medical Center recently overcame significant challenges in its clean-up efforts before a critical accreditation inspection. Over a six-month period, the hospital partnered with Precyse Solutions, a provider of healthcare management services, to achieve its objectives on time. The 407-bed hospital received its highest score ever from the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO) this year.

**Outsourcing Solution Sought**

SUNY Downstate Medical Center's Medical Records Department had reached the point of overflow. The file area where thousands of patient records were stored had become an obstacle course for employees to navigate. Boxes were piled from floor to ceiling and shelves were nearly impossible to reach. "The conditions were terrible. We had to literally jump over boxes," explained Director of Medical Records Shoshana Milstein. "You couldn't even approach the shelves to put a file in or pull one out because the space was so tight." Not only was storage a problem, but the records needed to be made available electronically so that physicians and other hospital staff could access patient information quickly and easily, and perform their jobs more efficiently. The problem became even more critical in light of an upcoming JCAHO survey, which determines a hospital's accreditation standing.

Realizing that outside help would be needed in getting the situation under control quickly, Milstein began researching vendors who offered archiving and organization services. Precyse Solutions, a Pennsylvania-based provider of health information management services, was selected to partner with the Medical Center on achieving its goal of getting the Medical Records Department organized.

The six-month project required the Precyse Solutions team to sort, organize and process each file, with up to 15 different steps per record. This included purging more than 150,000 inpatient, ambulatory surgery and emergency room records, preparing the records for scanning and archiving, and storing them—all without disturbing the facility's routine daily operations and in time for the JCAHO inspection.

David Wright, vice president of Precyse Solutions' Special Projects Division, was on-site to oversee the project. Working primarily in the evenings, a team of specialists purged thousands of aging medical records, and then sorted through the remaining records to remove duplicates and separate them by document type. Finally, the records had to be prepared for scanning by the hospital's document imaging system.

## **A Flood of Obstacles**

The road to organization got a bit rocky when Downstate Medical Center experienced not one, but two floods. Precyse Solutions' team had just begun its work when the hospital's sub-basement was flooded. Part of this area was being used as a staging area for the team's work on the project. As a result of the flooding, hundreds of boxed and loose records stored on the floor were soaked. The team quickly collected all of the damaged records and sent them off to a specialized company that used a freeze-drying method to dry out the documents. Once the records were returned to the hospital, the team began purging, sorting and labeling them.

Two weeks later, a holding area on the first floor of the facility, where boxed charts from Medical Records were being temporarily stored, was awash from a flood in the adjacent cafeteria. All of these boxes collapsed from water damage, and the Precyse Solutions team had to repeat the drying and sorting process.

Due to the unexpected floods, additional time and costs were incurred in restoring the documents. "We had a budget for the project with a cap on it. But we now realized that we couldn't do everything we had expected to do," said Milstein. She turned to David Wright, who reviewed the project's initial projections with her, and then outlined several options from which the medical center could choose. The hospital quickly decided to send some of the older charts out to an archival company for storage, instead of scanning them into the document imaging system. Even though the project went over budget, the choices recommended by Precyse Solutions were efficient both in dollar and time expenditures.

## **Goals Achieved**

Beginning in late November 2001, and despite the obstacles presented by Mother Nature, Precyse Solutions was able to prepare the Medical Records Department in time for the JCAHO survey in January 2002. In the week before the inspection, Precyse Solutions team members made sure that records were orderly and readily accessible. JCAHO members made a surprise visit to the Medical Records department one evening, but the survey results were favorable.

"JCAHO has only recently begun including surveys of medical records departments in the inspections, and I wasn't sure that they would visit us," said Milstein. "I was so relieved that the department was not in the disarray it had been earlier. There was no negativity whatsoever in JCAHO's comments on our area."

SUNY Downstate Medical Center received a 95 percent rating, its highest ever from JCAHO. The clean-up of the Medical Records department was certainly a key component that contributed to the excellent survey rating.

The department is also ready for the transitions that will come as the medical center undergoes a planned renovation in the near future. The systematically organized records will fit in easily with a new file system that has been ordered as part of the renovation.

According to Milstein, the Medical Records department's organization could not have been completed without the assistance from Precyse Solutions. "The value of our decision [to outsource] was reaffirmed when Precyse completed the job on time, even after the scope of the project expanded by 50 percent and we were further hampered by floods in both our medical records file room and the staging area being used for the initial sorting," she said. "Their ability to absorb unforeseen complications was simply amazing."

### **About The State University of New York (SUNY)**

The State University of New York is the largest system of higher education in the United States with more than 388,000 students in more than 5,000 fields of study on 64 campuses. Formally known as The State University of New York Health Science Center at Brooklyn, SUNY Downstate Medical Center traces its roots to 1860, when a school of medicine was founded at the Long Island College Hospital. The new college's faculty revolutionized medical education in the U.S. by bringing the teaching of medicine to the hospital bedside, thus rejecting the idea that physicians should be trained exclusively in university lecture halls.

Today, SUNY Downstate is one of the nation's leading urban medical centers and serves more than 2.3 million people. SUNY Downstate comprises a College of Medicine, College of Health Related Professions, College of Nursing, School of Graduate Studies, and University Hospital of Brooklyn.

### **About Precyse Solutions**

Precyse Solutions is an industry-leading provider of quantifiable, outsourced Health Information Management (HIM) services to U.S. based hospitals and healthcare organizations. Its services include medical transcription, coding, oncology data management, HIM consulting, and interim management, departmental outsourcing and client defined special projects such as backlog management. Healthcare providers utilize the company's services to streamline their capture and coding of clinical information, reduce their administrative operating costs, improve cash flows and maintain regulatory compliance. Precyse Solutions is privately held and headquartered in King of Prussia, PA. For more information, contact 1-800-555-2311, email [info@precysesolutions.com](mailto:info@precysesolutions.com) or visit [www.precysesolutions.com](http://www.precysesolutions.com).