

REVENUE CYCLE STRATEGIST

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Virtual Work Drives Productivity at Cleveland Clinic

By Heidi Peris

A work-from-home program improved employee productivity and engagement while reducing turnover and absenteeism.

Several years ago, Cleveland Clinic's culture of quality and innovation led the health system to restructure around the mantra "Patient First." As part of this effort, leaders took a comprehensive look at how patients engaged with Cleveland Clinic and its services. They discovered patients wanted more access to their health information and more opportunities to connect remotely.

With its extensive background in secure data exchange, Cleveland Clinic focused development efforts on patient portals and technology to support patient needs. Those efforts now allow patients the convenience of scheduling care, viewing educational materials, accessing health records, and communicating with caregivers online. These changes have significantly improved patient engagement and satisfaction.

Cleveland Clinic is now pursuing opportunities to apply the same data-driven technology to drive workflow and mobility for employees. By equipping staff with secure access to the information they need from wherever they are, Cleveland Clinic can design workflows that support quality while improving employee productivity and satisfaction.

Out of this effort, a work-from-home program has emerged and continues to expand across the organization. Through Patient First Support Services, which includes Cleveland Clinic's registration, scheduling, authorization, financial counseling, and customer service functions, the



work-from-home program has improved employee productivity and engagement while reducing turnover and absenteeism. As the health system continues to grow and office space becomes more limited, leaders anticipate continued expansion of this model to other areas of the organization.

Considering the Revenue Cycle Department

Leaders had observed the growth of telecommuting in other industries, with the number of employees working remotely tripling over the past 30 years, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. They began to consider the benefits of this model for certain roles in the revenue cycle department, with the goals of improving employee satisfaction and performance by providing a work-from-home option.

Patient First Support Services and IT project managers launched a pilot, with remote employees spending half of the week at home and half in the office. Later, due to on-site space constraints, the organization transitioned remote employees to working from home full time and coming to the office only as needed. The department maintains “hotel” spaces for visiting

employees to dock their equipment and work in the office.

After a successful pilot, Cleveland Clinic expanded the program to include positions in customer service and scheduling/registration. The number of employees participating in the program has grown from 20 to 70, and there is currently a push to determine if more employees qualify as space constraints continue.

Establishing a Remote-Worker Program

Initially, employees were required to be with Cleveland Clinic for a year before they had the option to work from home. While this has now been reduced to nine months, employees must demonstrate six months of meeting quality and productivity standards before moving to a home setting.

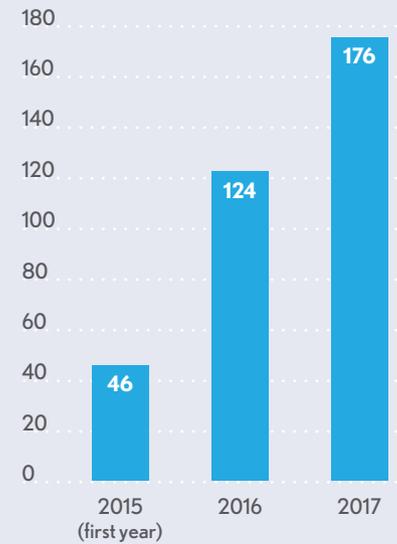
Once employees are working remotely, they are asked to commit to one year in their roles before applying for new positions within the organization. This prevents the department from losing the investment of transitioning employees to work-from-home arrangements. Similarly, if employees anticipate a residential move, they are asked to wait until after they move to transition to remote settings.

When transitioning employees to remote settings, the department purchases needed equipment including desktop computers, dual monitors, phones, and hardware components used to record and integrate phone calls to patient records. All software and applications used on-site are made available to remote employees through secure data connections.

To maintain a paperless office environment and ensure protection of personal health information, employees send and receive faxes electronically and capture images from websites rather than printing and scanning. Recordings and captured documents are indexed to the patient account and accessible to team members through the department’s communication management platform.

To ensure quality for both remote and on-site employees, supervisors review five cases per employee per month. All

Growth of Work-from-Home in Cleveland Clinic’s Patient First Support Services



Source: Cleveland Clinic. Used with permission.

records—including phone calls, faxes, and screen captures—are reviewed and compared to the department’s host system to check for quality and accuracy.

Managing a Remote Workforce

As work-from-home expands, the health system continues to learn the dynamics of managing a remote workforce. In one department, all but three employees work from home full time. Because supervisors cannot walk through the department and connect face-to-face with employees, Cleveland Clinic is providing tools and materials to help managers more effectively lead their teams.

Without the same degree of access to supervisors and co-workers, remote employees sometimes feel disconnected and miss the opportunity to collaborate with others. To address this, the department engages employees through weekly huddles where all team members join by phone to connect and share ideas and solutions. Employees can also work on-site one to two times per week if they choose.

Remote Roles in Cleveland Clinic’s Patient First Support Services

Remote Roles	Number of Employees
Analysts	3
Customer service	28
Financial counseling	15
Patient First Support Services Administration	4
Pre-access	84
Registration denials	6
Scheduling and registration	30
Vendor management	6
Grand total	176

Source: Cleveland Clinic. Used with permission.

To train new employees, the department asks high performers to come to the office to conduct peer-to-peer mentoring. As part of the job shadowing process, mentors discuss work-from-home strategies. Staff also have access to tools that show them how to convert their work-from-home spaces into paperless environments.

Once at home, remote staff are given pagers to reach supervisors with urgent questions. Supervisors use these opportunities for coaching, walking employees through solutions, and encouraging self-direction and problem-solving.

Reaping the Rewards

Ultimately, the benefits of improving employee mobility and workflow through the program have been far-reaching. Patient First Support Services measures

productivity by the number of recordings, electronic faxes, and images employees capture within a shift. Since initiating its work-from-home program, the department has experienced a 13 percent increase in productivity. Leaders credit the improvement to fewer distractions.

The program has added flexibility for staff, improving engagement and satisfaction while reducing turnover and absenteeism. Employees who would otherwise not be able to continue working now have the option to work from home.

For example, several employees who moved to other states have been able to maintain their positions with the organization. Employees with health issues have also benefited by working from home when they could not come to the office. This helped one employee undergoing

chemotherapy treatments and others suffering from injuries that were better managed from home to continue their employment.

Leading in Remote Work

Just as Cleveland Clinic has been an innovator in patient portals and remote patient engagement, it is now among the organizations leading healthcare to join other industries already experiencing the benefits of the work-from-home model. Allowing caregivers to engage remotely and utilizing workflows that support mobility safely and securely, will continue to yield results in employee satisfaction and productivity as the trend continues to grow. •

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