SUPPLY CHAIN

Workflow debt is real. Here's how healthcare can move beyond it.

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Cost containment, supply fragility and contract compliance have made the healthcare supply chain a survival issue. ERP modernization helps — but on its own it cannot resolve the exceptions and disruptions that pile up between trading partners.

Becker's Healthcare spoke with GHX Chief Strategy Officer Chris Luoma and Vice President of Product Management Marlin Doner about how hospitals and health systems can build more resilient supply chains.

The cost of workflow debt

Disconnected systems, fragmented data and manual processes create what GHX calls *workflow debt*: approval bottlenecks, cross-organization handoffs, fragmented decision-making and constant manual coordination. The interest on that debt is rework, exception chasing and reconciliation that never ends.

The financial drag is measurable. One large provider organization that analyzed the cost of handling exceptions and disruptions on its own found it consumed roughly 1.5% of annual supply chain spend. "It's not immaterial," Mr. Luoma said.

New technology alone does not close the gap. "It really takes a complete process redesign and thinking about the end-to-end flow and outcomes you want to achieve," Mr. Luoma said. "Providers are still on that journey."

Resolution also depends on the other side of the transaction. "Organizations need a platform approach that provides two-sided visibility where partners have a shared understanding of the issues and how to take appropriate action," Mr. Doner said. "Upgrading an ERP alone can't solve for this." Neither providers nor suppliers become resilient in isolation.

> *Resilience must be built across a connected ecosystem, with visibility, intelligence and action flowing in both directions.*

Connected intelligence

Connected intelligence unifies contract, inventory, ERP and payment signals so an organization can see the supply chain as one system — turning fragmented data into coordinated operational guidance.

Its most valuable property is anticipation. "To proactively see problems, you must mine all of these kinds of moments across supply chains, bring the signals and information together and create intelligence to focus your work," Mr. Luoma said.

Context matters as much as detection: a product shortage lands differently on a multi-warehouse IDN than on an independent community hospital, and each carries different contracts with manufacturers and distributors. Connected partners can share not just the signal but the appropriate response.

Disruptions — back-orders, recalls, substitutions — can often be detected early enough to act before the impact reaches the point of care. Exceptions are different: they block orders from processing because a data point is missing, incorrect or misaligned. "It could be a part-number exception, a misaligned unit of measure, conversion factor or price," Mr. Doner said. When both parties work from the same data, the network can flag where reconciliation is needed in advance.

From signals to agentic orchestration

Shared intelligence is the foundation for orchestration — what Mr. Luoma described as "end-to-end workflow that delivers the business outcomes the industry and customers need." Price reconciliation, autonomous sourcing, product substitution and inventory optimization are all candidates for automation that would otherwise accrue as workflow debt.

GHX already applies AI at the transaction level for touchless invoice smoothing, automatically resolving invoice-to-PO discrepancies across 75 million to 80 million invoices a year. Generative AI tools have pushed touchless transactions and perfect orders higher: "In the last year, we've seen over 70% of accounts improve their perfect order rate," Mr. Luoma said. "That's tens of thousands of hours eliminated ... and it translates into real dollars."

Today the model keeps a human in the loop, surfacing recommendations supply chain teams can act on while the industry builds trust in AI-generated guidance. The roadmap runs three horizons: advanced analytics that surface network patterns, generative AI that recommends actions, and fully agentic workflows that execute them.

As modern ERP platforms mature on both ends of the transaction, GHX positions itself as the network-level orchestration layer between them — a supply chain that senses signals, decides, acts and learns, reducing workflow debt at the ecosystem level rather than one transaction at a time.

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