



Palmetto Health Protects Patient and Staff Safety, Accreditation Status and Mitigates Risk through GHX Credentialing and Access Management Solutions

Organization

- Palmetto Health
- Columbia, S.C.

GHX Products

- GHX Vendormate Credentialing

Highlights

Palmetto Health transitioned its vendor credentialing and management processes from manual, and disjointed to electronic, centralized and streamlined using GHX solutions. Today, the healthcare system has greater visibility and control over vendor representatives' access to its facilities, staff and patients, and is using GHX solutions to help drive safety and compliance, and mitigate risk.

Overview

Palmetto Health is the largest and most comprehensive integrated healthcare system in the South Carolina Midlands region. In fiscal year 2015, Palmetto Health included five Joint Commission-accredited acute-care hospitals with 1,138 patient beds – Palmetto Health Baptist, Palmetto Health Baptist Parkridge, Palmetto Health Children's Hospital, Palmetto Health Heart Hospital and Palmetto Health Richland – as well as an expansive physician practice network, dozens of affiliated clinics and specialty care practices, and a 501(c)(3) foundation.

Challenges

To meet compliance obligations related to accreditation needs, healthcare organizations need to have in place policies and procedures to track vendor representatives that enter their facilities and know where they are at all times. Furthermore, they must decide which vendors are defined as "business associates" under HIPAA and put appropriate safeguards in place to prevent unauthorized use and disclosure of patients' electronic protected health information (ePHI).

Like every U.S. healthcare system, Palmetto Health faced the challenge of managing its huge population of vendors and their representatives interacting both face-to-face with team members on-site and those remotely via telephone, email, fax, text and other electronic means of communication. Keeping track of compliance with regulatory, accreditation and other requirements related to vendors was a daunting task.

“Reps are in our facilities and we need to know who they are, where they are, what time they arrive and when they leave,” said Cheryl Watkins-Knowles, director of Purchasing for Palmetto Health. “They must be immunized, sign-off on our rules of conduct and we need to know whether the individual reps or their companies have been sanctioned. We were trying to manage all of that manually and had a lot of people and time involved in the process. We knew we needed help.”

Solution

To gain better visibility and control over its vendor population and improve compliance with both internal policies and regulatory and industry requirements, Palmetto Health implemented GHX credentialing and access management solutions.

“When we learned that GHX has a solution that credentials vendors at not only the individual rep level but also at the company level, we made them our partner,” said Watkins-Knowles. “Not all companies provide that level of credentialing.”

With GHX solutions, Palmetto Health can:

- Credential all vendors at a company level and individual representative level
 - » Manage document and policy acknowledgements
 - » Perform monthly sanction checks
 - » Perform business verification
- Control on-site access with integrated badging capability
 - » Know which reps are in its facilities and in which areas they are allowed to access
 - » Help verify that representatives have the same level of infectious disease vaccinations as on-site staff
 - » Require appointments to improve access control and minimize disruptions for staff members
- Be prepared for external compliance audits
 - » Meet credentialing-related accreditation (e.g. The Joint Commission, DNV GL) needs through the establishment of a credentialing program
 - » Centralize all vendor data in one place for quick and easy access

“You don’t need to reinvent the wheel when it comes to vendor credentialing and management – GHX can tell you best practices” said Watkins-Knowles. “Every time I’ve reached out to GHX they’ve been there to support me. It has been a great transition.”

Protect Patient Privacy and Safety

Representatives must register within the GHX Vendormate Credentialing portal, provide required documentation, sign-off on Palmetto Health’s policies and be current on immunizations before entering any of the healthcare system’s facilities. GHX provides initial screening and ongoing monitoring of vendors and representatives for non-compliance with internal policies and government mandates, while providing Palmetto Health timely and updated information. When a representative enters a facility, he/she must sign into the portal, which is accessed through Palmetto Health’s website. If he/she is currently compliant, GHX Vendormate Credentialing will print him/her a badge. If not, the system will direct the representative to speak with someone at the facility.

“Unless you know how to identify vendors, you don’t know what they’re doing,” said Watkins-Knowles. “Our vendors sign-in, are integrated with our system and must wear badges. We are able to see where they are located and make sure they are adhering to our policies. We know if they’ve had their TB test, undergone HIPAA training and reviewed our safety materials.”

Palmetto Health can adjust representative requirements based on the individual’s level of access to a facility. For example, the healthcare system has more compliance requirements for individuals authorized to be in patient care areas, compared with those who visit non-care areas (e.g. materials management department) or representatives that remain off-site.

Help Control Spending

Within the GHX Vendormate Credentialing portal, representatives are required to list the specific Palmetto Health team member they are meeting and the purpose of the meeting. The healthcare system has a policy that prevents representatives from introducing new products to clinicians unless they have first been cleared with the materials management department. According to Watkins-Knowles, this helps her organization avoid unscheduled interruptions to her staff and better manage procurement.

“Clinicians can document their conversations with reps in the GHX portal,” said Watkins-Knowles. “If a rep violated one of our policies, we know what happened and can take steps to address the

issue. Our clinicians really love this program because they know they are helping to mitigate risk and protect our patients, team members and healthcare system.”

Avoid Fines and Business Impacts

Non-credentialed vendors present potential risks to the financial health of provider organizations. For example, if a provider transacts business with a vendor that has been subject to a government sanction, such as those resulting from monthly Office of Inspector General (OIG) checks, and applies for government reimbursement for that vendor’s products, they will be denied payment.

Medicare fraud presents another issue. An estimated 10 percent of U.S. healthcare dollars are fraudulent, stemming from false medical claims, fake vendors and other illegal business practices.¹ Other risks facing providers are vendor representative conflicts of interest, violation of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid (CMS) Stark Law and non-compliance with gift laws.

Using GHX credentialing and access management solutions, Palmetto Health screens the vendors with which it transacts business for government sanctions and fraud, and requests reports of potential conflicts of interest. This helps the system avoid fines, penalties and reimbursement denials as well as the business risks of being associated with disreputable vendors.

“The Department of Health and Human Services Office of Inspector General (OIG) says it is a duty-of-care for us to abide by the rules and avoid buying products from sanctioned entities or individuals,” said Watkins-Knowles.

“By performing checks at the company and rep level, GHX helps keep us from being fined or sanctioned, and mitigates our risk associated with the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA).”

A One Stop Shop

With all of its vendors consolidated in GHX’s vendor master, Watkins-Knowles can access sourcing, contracting, compliance and representative credentialing from a single sign-on. She also can generate reports on Palmetto Health’s overall vendor population.

“If I need a certain product and don’t know where to get it from, I can look at a potential vendor list in GHX to evaluate our options,” said Watkins-Knowles.

Results

Working with GHX, Palmetto Health has achieved the following:

- Established an electronic, centralized and streamlined process, and system for vendor credentialing and management
- Improved compliance with internal and external vendor policies, including The Joint Commission, HIPAA and OIG
- Protected patient and staff safety by requiring documented evidence that representatives entering its facilities have complied with its policies and are current on immunizations and safety materials
- Safeguarded its accreditation status and business by mitigating compliance risk
- Saved staff time and effort (clinical and other departments) by requiring appointments and preventing disruptions

About GHX

GHX offers a complete solution for vendor sourcing, management and contracting that leverages our network of 68,000 credentialed vendors, representing virtually every category of spend. With access to this vast network of better vendor data and integrated solutions, providers are positioned to streamline every stage of the contracting lifecycle, as well as make decisions that better support supply chain and compliance goals.

<http://www.economist.com/news/united-states/21603078-why-thieves-love-americas-health-care-system-272-billion-swindle>



©2017 Global Healthcare Exchange, LLC. All rights reserved. GHX is a trademark of Global Healthcare Exchange, LLC.