IMPROVING HEALTHCARE QUALITY THROUGH OUTSOURCING

Abstract

While the healthcare industry requires to be resilient and prepared to face any crises, it faces challenges on several fronts such as operational issues, patient expectations and staffing shortages. To keep pace with dynamic requirements, healthcare providers should consider outsourcing business processes and focus on fortifying their core competencies.

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In a post-pandemic world, the healthcare industry is grappling with changes in almost every aspect. During the pandemic, pharmaceuticals, hospitals, labs and clinical research firms experienced unprecedented demands that turned the industry on its head, resulting in massive transformation in terms of operations, services and patient expectations. In a study conducted by Salesforce, 47 per cent of people believe that the healthcare industry is focused more on industry needs than patient needs. Even today, hospitals have to deal with unabated pressure. Top-tier patient care remains the highest priority and challenge, with requirements for higher standards of safety protocols, increased resilience and better preparedness. Hospitals also face a staffing crisis, with burnout and fatigue amongst healthcare workers often leading to mental health crises.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) predicts a staggering shortfall of 10 million healthcare workers by 2030. While this steep shortfall is mostly in low and middle-income countries, the global healthcare workforce shortage cannot be ignored, it requires urgent attention too. Combating the workforce crisis requires a multi-pronged strategy. Healthcare providers need to be able to provide better working conditions, better employee care and also focus on their core competencies.

One of the most promising ways to combat these challenges is to outsource all non-core activities. That would give healthcare professionals the bandwidth to ensure better patient care and consequently, higher customer satisfaction.
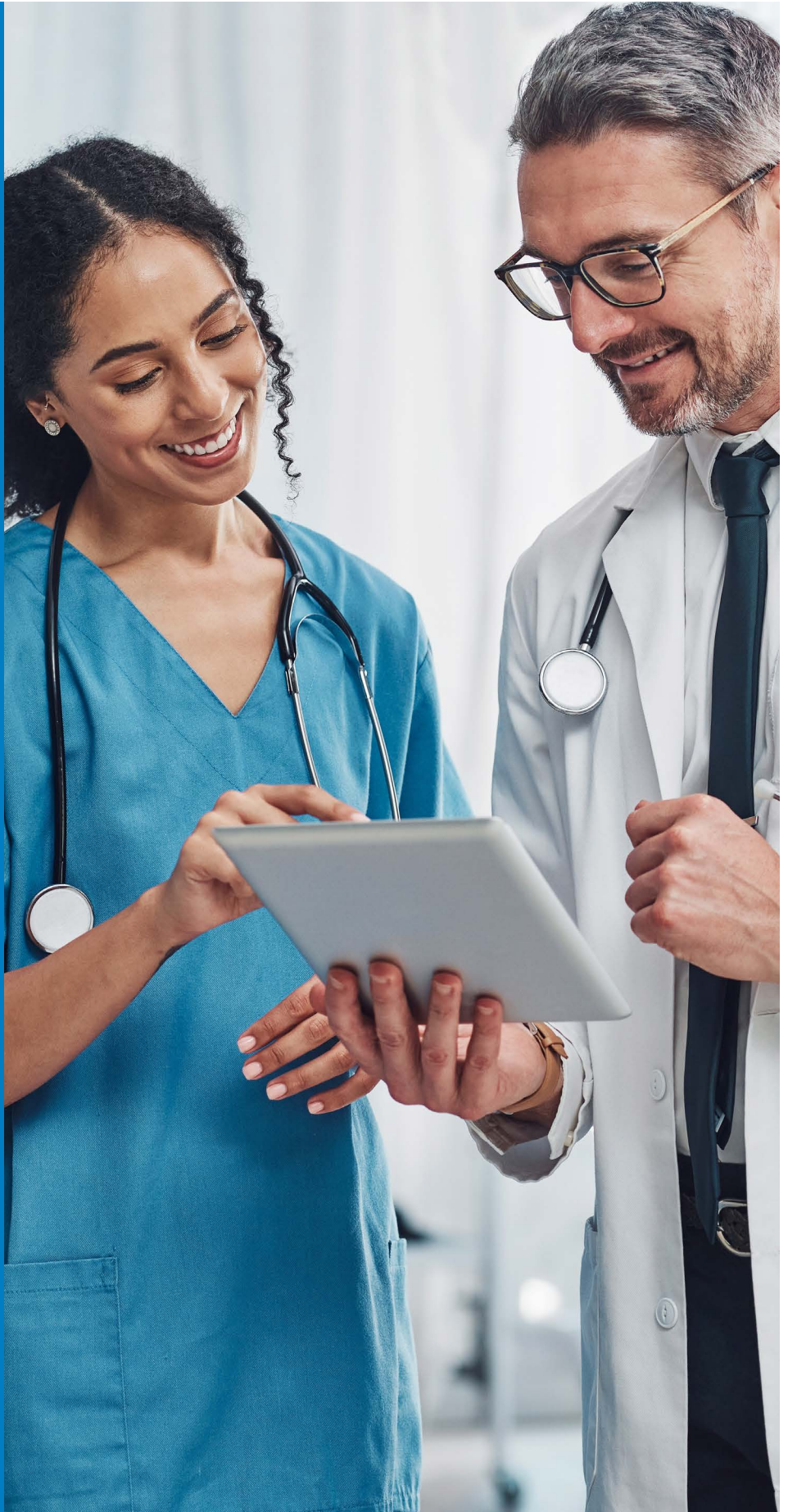
BPO services for healthcare

Several hospital management activities can be outsourced to business process outsourcing (BPO) providers.

• Scheduling patient appointments

Hospitals that are already crunched for staff are hard-pressed for time to onboard and train new hires for administrative tasks such as appointment scheduling. By engaging an experienced healthcare BPO provider, hospitals can get access to a dedicated team that handles patient queries and appointments for consultations, treatments, procedures and so on. BPO providers also come equipped with the latest in technology, allowing for appointment scheduling across multiple channels, and deploying AI chatbots that are available 24x7. The chatbots can analyse patient interactions, determine peak times and schedule appointments based on patient preferences. By outsourcing patient appointments, hospitals save on both costs and time needed to hire and train staff, while patients have an improved experience and access to a dedicated team that handles all enquiries.

• IT infrastructure management

With technology deeply interwoven with healthcare, reliable and robust IT systems have become the backbone of hospitals. Patient data, digital imaging and hospital management data must be protected from cyber threats and other disruptions. Healthcare BPO providers can provide services and support for both IT and cybersecurity. Such providers are also bound by strict compliance regulations such as the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), which is designed to protect patient privacy and security. A specialised BPO provider can also help healthcare institutions adhere to industry regulations, ensuring minimal exposure to possible legal penalties and liabilities.

• Medical transcription

Medical transcription has been one of the top services in healthcare outsourcing. The service helps in accurate consolidation of medical data. Medical transcriptionists convert audio recordings of medical procedures, notes or consultations into records. This service is very popular as it saves doctors valuable time, which can then be spent on patient consultations and medical procedures instead of transcribing notes. Medical transcription is a specialised service requiring trained professionals with an understanding of medical terms. Accurate transcription is required, and the BPO provider is typically required to submit their HIPAA compliance to ensure safety of patient data. With transcription taken care of, hospitals can continue to focus on patient care and their core activities.

• Medical coding and billing

Medical coding is one of the most important processes in the healthcare industry. It involves translating patient information into standard alphanumeric codes that are universally accepted in the industry. These codes are understood by insurance companies and other healthcare companies, and are used for billing and tracking payments. Coders need to be able to interpret physician notes and assign an appropriate code for a patient's condition. Accurate codes are necessary for smooth billing and claims processing. Medical coding is a high-skill requirement and demands trained professionals. Coders face challenges such as inaccurate or incomplete patient health records and constantly changing coding guidelines. Outsourcing medical coding and billing can save hospitals tremendous training and administrative overheads in terms of time and cost.

• Claims processing

Claims processing is a complex process in healthcare that requires trained personnel who are familiar with rules and regulations. Automatic processes are required to validate patient data to ensure that the claim is valid in terms of eligibility, number of allowed visits, reimbursement limits and so on. By partnering with a trusted BPO provider, hospitals can reduce the overheads related to training their staff and achieve lower errors. BPO providers who specialise in claims processing offer customised software that reduce the margin of error and provide faster processing rates, resulting in fewer denials and pending claims.

Benefits of outsourcing healthcare processes

- Engaging with an experienced healthcare BPO provider relieves hospitals of several administrative overheads and lets them utilise their resources for other tasks.

- Hospitals get access to expertise for complex tasks such as medical coding and billing, resulting in smoother operations.

- Additionally, the healthcare provider no longer has to spend time and effort on training resources. Outsourcing to experienced BPO providers improves process efficiency and reduces costs. Medical professionals and service representatives can now focus more on what matters most - the patient.

- Healthcare contact centres can offer multilingual agents who can speak to customers from different regions.

- Apart from that they have extensive technology infrastructure that can be deployed to offer omnichannel experiences to healthcare consumers.

Going beyond operational challenges, healthcare providers also need to look at the big picture. The industry needs to be able to respond effectively to public health emergencies. Collaboration and partnerships are essential to be able to function efficiently and to offer equity in healthcare access. Technology is a game-changer for the healthcare industry. Being able to analyse data to predict trends, allocate resources optimally and make data-driven decisions are proving to be critical for the healthcare industry. A robust partnership between healthcare providers and BPO companies will help build a patient-centric healthcare system.

How Infosys BPM can help

Technology is already at the forefront managing the changing dynamics of the healthcare industry. Infosys BPM's healthcare services combine strong domain expertise and technological experience in healthcare BPO to transform processes that result in quality improvement, reduced costs and better customer service.

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