



Self-Care in Healthcare:

Prioritizing Mental Health for
Your Revenue Cycle Team



Mental Health: The Silent Pandemic in Healthcare

Healthcare workers, both frontline and those in back-office or support roles, face unprecedented stress and fatigue. The pandemic has caused an extreme ebbing and flowing of healthcare patients. Half of American hospitals finished 2022 with a [negative margin](#), making it the worst financial year since the start of the pandemic.

Revenue cycle teams are dealing with increasingly complex claims, rising denial rates, pressure to improve yield, ever-changing payer rules and requirements, overworked teams, and staff turnover. Everyone is being asked to do more with less.

The result: remaining healthcare workers are burnt out and experiencing increasing mental health challenges.

On top of the shifting healthcare demand and pandemic-induced stress, **burnout** and **turnover** are two of the top reasons healthcare financial leaders are struggling to hire, according to an [HFMA survey](#). Healthcare workers are leaving in record numbers — churn is [up 3.6%](#) from the previous year, while hospitals had [100.5% turnover](#) from 2017–21 alone. These positions are especially difficult to fill in the healthcare revenue cycle, with many leaders reporting it takes [more than six months to fill senior positions](#).

Prioritize your people

Hospital CEOs say their top concern right now is [workforce challenges](#).



57% OF HEALTH SYSTEMS AND HOSPITALS HAVE 100+ OPEN ROLES TO FILL ACROSS OPERATIONS



20% OF HEALTHCARE FINANCE LEADERS NEED TO HIRE 30+ EMPLOYEES TO STAFF THEIR REV CYCLE FULLY

[AKASA](#)

This leaves fewer hands to deal with the already insurmountable workload healthcare organizations are facing. **It's likely never been more challenging to work in the revenue cycle.**

An environment that supports mental wellness and provides a space for self-care is more important than ever. Revenue cycle leaders are in a position to effect change and create a space where self-care and mental health are not just supported — they're the foundation on which healthy, successful RCM teams are built.

Having a mentally and emotionally strong team will benefit everyone: your staff, your organization, and the patients you serve. And it will demonstrate your strengths as a leader. So start fostering a workplace that supports mental health and encourages self-care.

Here's how you can focus on mental wellness and self-care in the revenue cycle:

The crumbling state of mental health



27% OF AMERICANS REPORT FEELING SYMPTOMS OF AN ANXIETY DISORDER OR DEPRESSION

[National Center for Health Statistics](#)

\$44 BILLION

BILLION IS SPENT ON LOST WORKPLACE PRODUCTIVITY DUE TO DEPRESSION.

[Tufts Medical Center and One Mind at Work](#)

100% INCREASE

INCREASE IN MENTAL HEALTH VISITS SINCE THE PANDEMIC BEGAN

[Blue Cross Blue Shield](#)



“Healthcare leaders regularly tell me how the past few years have taken a toll on their teams. Everyone’s burnt out.

The healthcare revenue cycle is at a breaking point.

My mother is a psychologist, and I’ve personally been involved in numerous efforts to raise awareness about the importance of mental health, so this is an issue near and dear to my heart.

Every healthcare leader needs to stop and check the pulse on the mental health of their teams — and themselves — right now.

Ask yourself what resources and solutions you can bring to ease your team’s burden. Are you regularly checking in with your team? Hearing their concerns? More importantly, are you following up on their concerns?

The mental well-being of your staff is mission-critical. The revenue cycle is rife with complex, challenging, stressful work. Work that keeps our healthcare system functioning, sees our communities and patients healthy and well, and ultimately acts as a foundation for a healthy society.

There’s never been a greater need for bolstering mental health and caring for our teams. And you, as a healthcare leader, are in the unique position to empower your team and ensure that they’re thriving.”

BEN BEADLE-RYBY
Co-founder of AKASA



Lead With Empathy

“Lead With Empathy” is a [core company value at AKASA](#). We’ve found we work better by embracing an overall spirit of generosity, kindness, and inclusivity. Empathy should be at the forefront of any team management approach. At the foundation of every care-centric team is a leader who understands the team and its struggles.

In the healthcare revenue cycle, it’s easy for people to get tunnel vision and focus solely on tasks in order to keep up: performing eligibility checks, running through claims, keeping up with denials, and concentrating on cost-to-collect and A/R days. This lens on outcomes can lead to isolation and make people less likely to come to you or team leads with problems — personal or work-related.

Lead with empathy and establish trust by regularly asking your team how they’re doing, as a group and one-on-one. Empathy goes a long way toward helping people feel less alone, building rapport among your team, and establishing trust across the board.

The revenue cycle is fast-paced, and it’s easy for your team to neglect the need to slow down and acknowledge something is wrong. Reaching out can be the tiny nudge people need to open up.



ASHLEY MANGIULLI
Associate Director
of RCO Projects
at AKASA

“Be the person that slows down and gives that quick check-in at the front desk. Even just messaging them when you’re remote to say, ‘How are things going?’ I’ve found that by having that door open and being available, you get more people that (with time) become more comfortable sharing where they’re at. And make sure when you’re taking that time, especially if someone’s coming to you in that one-on-one space, to turn off messages and notifications. Make it so you’re fully devoted to them.”

How to become an empathetic leader

- Ask people how they’re doing, keeping conversations informal. A simple “how are you?” is often enough to start a conversation, and a personalized follow-up around a previously discussed issue shows you’re invested in their well-being.
- Be open with your team and share updates about your well-being if you’re comfortable doing so.
- Request feedback from your team — what’s working/not working, how can you make their time at work better, etc. — and act on it.
- Listen during talks, making sure to acknowledge their words and emotions.
- Turn concerns into improvements by acting on problems you hear about and making changes.

Listening is a core part of leading with empathy. Regularly check in with your team and listen to what they say. People want and need an empathetic ear, and you’re given the opportunity to provide that as a leader. The more you listen and check in with your team, the more comfortable they’ll be coming to you with problems, too. It’s a feedback loop that only gets more effective over time.

Take a step back and evaluate your current leadership style. Are you leading with empathy? We’re all human, and you’re as vulnerable to stress as anyone on your team. Is this impacting your leadership style? Are you too focused on yield and not on your team? Empathy is essential to successful leadership. If it’s not your strong suit right now, invest in leadership training or secure a mentorship. Turn yourself into the leader your team needs.



Leverage Employee Assistance Programs

Many organizations offer Employee Assistance Programs (EAP), which give employees a safe place to have a free evaluation for any potential mental health or emotional challenges they’re facing. An EAP will also typically provide support during times of loss or struggle, which is especially important for those working in a high-stress environment like the revenue cycle.

If your healthcare organization offers EAPs, ensure your entire team knows about the program and how to access it. Update your existing onboarding documents as well, and again: remind your team that the EAP is always there for those who want mental health or emotional support that’s confidential.





Provide Neurodivergent-Specific Support

Neurodiversity covers anyone with mental functions “divergent” from what’s considered typical. It’s believed that as much as [40% of the population](#) is neurodivergent. Despite the high numbers, this population often doesn’t receive the support it needs — [85% of college grads](#) with autism are unemployed.

There’s a good chance you have neurodiverse representation within your revenue cycle team, and you need to provide appropriate support.

Work with specialists to ensure your organization has every necessary resource to support the success of the neurodivergent population. They may need accommodations like noise-canceling headphones or more flexibility with their schedules — accommodations your organization can typically provide that make a world of difference.

You also need neurodivergent-friendly communication. Common conversational habits, like maintaining eye contact or shaking hands, are difficult for some neurodivergent people. It’s also important you ask direct questions and avoid hypotheticals, as they are sometimes challenging for those with certain types of neurodivergence.

Make it known within your team that it’s important for others to read the room and not discount those displaying neurodivergent behavior. These practices should also apply to the interview process, giving all interviewees a chance to succeed.

Push for neurodiverse representation within your leadership team as well. When neurodiversity is represented in leadership, decisions and policies will factor in neurodivergent populations and perspectives.

As a result, your workplace is more likely to become accessible to those with any kind of neurodivergence.

Neurodiverse populations include those with:

- ADHD
- Autism
- Dyslexia
- Learning disabilities
- Obsessive-compulsive disorder
- And more

Avoid bias toward these common neurodivergent behaviors

- Minimal eye contact
- Repeating certain phrases or statements
- Tics or nonverbal language
- Little or no small talk

By supporting neurodivergence within your organization, you’re building an equitable workplace where everyone has the opportunity to succeed in healthcare. You’re also ensuring neurodiverse people get the chance to strengthen your organization with their abilities.

Be Flexible

Self-care and wellness take time, meaning your organization needs to provide flexibility for RCM staff. We don’t get to decide when we need self-care. Life happens. It’s important your team can log off and do what they need to do when necessary. Unfortunately, the revenue cycle isn’t known for flexibility. It’s difficult to maintain proper staffing during normal circumstances, let alone have excess staff capable of covering time off.

Do you have different team members who can work eligibility, patient cost estimation, authorizations, denials, or appeals? Is everyone on your team trained to cover every payer? If you answered “no” to any of these, it’s time to consider [cross-training your team](#).

Have employees who excel in different areas train their colleagues on how to handle their responsibilities. Over time, your cross-trained team will have fewer skill and knowledge gaps, and increased coverage.

Cross-training your team also allows your revenue cycle staff to learn new skills and provides the potential for upward mobility. Those engaged in learning are [23% more likely](#) to take on extra responsibilities, while most revenue cycle staff [want upward mobility](#).

In other words, cross-training is a win-win.

Flexibility might result in accounts aging slightly or work queues growing in the short term, but your team’s well-being is essential to the success of your entire organization. Failing to provide this flexibility can and will lead to burnout, team dissatisfaction, and churn.

“Mental health and well-being are crucial to the success of any team. In my experience, the way to ensure this happens is to build a cross-functional team that can collaborate and leverage expertise across multiple departments. This creates the flexibility and peace of mind necessary for employees to feel comfortable that somebody will cover their work while they take time off. For my team, this model increased teamwork and garnered more trust among the group.”



SEQUITA MYERS-CARLISLE
Director of RCO Projects
at AKASA

Make Time for Office Cleanup



Spring cleaning isn’t just for homes. A clean workspace can [increase your well-being](#) and make the work experience more pleasant overall.

Set aside time for you and your team to clean your workspaces and consider making an event out of it. It’s therapeutic, makes it easier for your team to find what they need quicker, and provides a nice change of pace compared to the usual workday. Cleanliness and organization are vital in the revenue cycle, where you’re often sharing a workspace with others.

Are there updates to your area that can easily be made? A spot for 1:1 conversations? New posters on the wall? More snacks? Ask the team what they want and need. Then implement what you can.



Set Realistic Expectations

Overexertion isn't sustainable for anyone and is incredibly damaging to self-care. (It's also a great way to burn your team out and create mental health challenges.) But, it's often difficult to know what workload is feasible within the healthcare revenue cycle, beyond your team telling you when they're overworked — which they should be comfortable doing if you're leading with empathy. This is largely due to a lack of proper benchmarking.

Have employees who excel in different areas train their colleagues on how to handle their responsibilities. Over time, your cross-trained team will have fewer skill and knowledge gaps, and increased coverage.



84% OF REVENUE CYCLE OPERATIONS TEAMS USE PRODUCTIVITY STANDARDS OR QUOTAS TO MEET GOALS.

[AKASA](#)

It's not possible to set reasonable standards for your team without time-per-task info and meaningful insights into current workloads. Trying to set standards without this information leaves too much to chance and makes it easy for you to set the bar too high or low.

While realistic benchmarks are necessary for setting standards, little-to-no accurate insights exist. There are some standard benchmarks, but they often contain many gaps. AKASA can help.

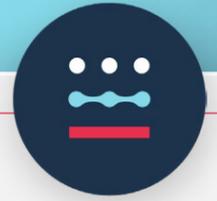
By analyzing client data, we offer [real-world information](#) on how long many common revenue cycle processes take, down to the second. We now use this information and best practices to inform our automation and process for current clients.

“Even leaders within healthcare organizations often don't fully comprehend the complexity of RCM as they do other subject areas. Because of that, it is not uncommon for them to make decisions without understanding the impact on revenue cycle teams.”



JENN ARLAS
Solutions Architect
at AKASA

Once data-backed expectations are set, remind your team not to overdo it. Yes, there's a chance your team isn't fully staffed, but it's essential your team get quality time off and have a chance to breathe. Again, while queues may grow slightly, your team burning out and churning will have a far worse impact on your RCM performance.



Be realistic. Set the right standards today.



DOWNLOAD
your free productivity benchmarks report

Encourage Walks

It's a simple but valuable fact:

People need breaks for walks outside.

Regular walks do the body and mind a lot of good, especially when you're a busy healthcare RCM worker stuck at a desk looking at an endless queue of claims. It's also not uncommon for those working in the back office to be in a location with few or no windows, which is [detrimental to one's well-being](#). Taking frequent walks can help.



“Whether we're physicians or nurses or in the revenue cycle, providing direct or indirect care, we're all ultimately playing a role in caring for our patients. In order to provide quality care, we have to care for ourselves too. I often think of the concept of putting an oxygen mask on yourself before someone next to you during an airplane emergency. It's a tough concept to follow, but we need to spend time to make sure we're as strong as we can be, so we can be strong for our patients and deliver quality care.”



ASHLEY MANGIULLI

Associate Director
of RCO Projects
at AKASA

Take walks around the parking lot and encourage your team to do so as well. Walks can improve mental health ([among other benefits](#)) and don't take a lot of time. Even better, hold one-on-ones outside, tack walks onto the end of a lunch break, or have informal team walks that provide quality time for your team to socialize if they'd like.

If possible, take walks yourself to show your team it's encouraged and not a “waste of time” for them to do the same. And even better — when you're about to go for a walk, ask if anyone available wants to join you.

Provide Self-Care Tools

There are a number of [tools that foster self-care](#), from meditation apps to feedback tools, that allow your team to check in and talk about their well-being easily. Talk to HR about what you currently offer and make sure your team is aware. Need something else? See what fits your budget and provide your team with tools that help them practice self-care. Also, give them the right channels to voice their own concerns around well-being as well — anonymous questionnaires or surveys, safe and secure social forums, etc.

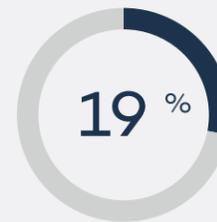
It's also a good idea to anonymously survey your team and ask if there are any tools around care or mental health they'd like added or subbed in. Choose your own cadence for sending these surveys, but consider sending them anytime your team's grown or had numerous changes.

Encourage the Use of Benefits

Regularly remind your team of any benefits they have access to — be it paid time off or wellness stipends.

Did you know that [55% of Americans](#) don't use all of their time off? Be sure to encourage it to recharge. It's also helpful if you use your own time off and set a positive example. If you're always working and never taking time off, your team will feel pressured to do the same.

While it's often difficult for revenue cycle teams to take time off, especially if you're facing [staffing challenges](#), the dip in overall productivity is worth it in the long run. And again, if you're cross-training everyone, it's easier for your team to take time off.



19 %
OF COMPANIES OFFER
SEPARATE MENTAL
HEALTH DAYS FOR
THEIR WORKFORCE.

[The Harris Poll](#)

It's also not enough that you encourage people to take time. You need the right support for people to use their time off.

Review what kind of prep is required by those wanting to take time off. Can someone schedule a day or a week out, worry-free? Or do they need to work ahead and build a plan? This kind of prep work can discourage people from using their time and further contribute to burnout and the degradation of one's well-being.

If you're not properly staffed, bring in contract workers (if possible) to ensure shifts are covered, and your team is able to take time off. Look into technology that can automate repetitive, time-consuming tasks, allowing your team to focus on more crucial tasks. Ideally, you can make a case for additional staffing or technology to provide proper coverage during time off, having extra staff work on more time-consuming matters when no one needs vacation coverage.

“You need to allow your team to take off early if they're overwhelmed, a family emergency came up, and so on. Yes, you might have a little less productivity on a particular payer or workflow that day. But the goal is to help your team sustain further into their current role and not burn out. We have to really think about how to balance these things, but it's worth the effort when you are able to create a healthy, well-functioning team.”



AMY RAYMOND

VP of Revenue Cycle
Operations at AKASA



Offer Remote Opportunities

The past few years have seen a shift in remote work across industries, including healthcare — [59% of medical practices](#) moved staff to full-time or hybrid remote positions between 2021–22.

Despite this shift, many healthcare leaders have concerns and hesitation about remote work. This is understandable, as healthcare isn't known as a remote-centric industry. But this type of work is worth the effort, as it can allow for increased flexibility.

Increased flexibility gives your team breathing room in the event of an unplanned family emergency, allows you to hire from a larger talent pool and provide support for existing staff, and makes it possible for staff to avoid stressful travel — all perks that help with mental well-being.

When transitioning your RCM team to a remote or hybrid model, there are a few steps to keep in mind:

1. Give roles the right tools

Make sure you know each role and what they need to succeed. No two positions in RCM are the same, meaning each one needs different support in a remote setting.

2. Identify which roles are remote-friendly

Knowing the ins and outs of each RCM role not only helps you support them, but it also allows you to identify which positions are suitable for remote in the first place.

3. Review entire workflows for remote fit

As you roll out a remote or hybrid model, review workflows impacted directly and indirectly by the roles going remote. If you see a point of tension or a problem area — communication breakdown between remote and in-office, etc. — check in with the remote role and the in-office positions to figure out a solution.

4. Be a present leader

It's easy for people to feel isolated in a remote setting. In fact, [59% of healthcare workers](#) felt a dip in camaraderie after going remote. Regularly check in on your team and see how they're doing, set up online team-building calls or events, and ensure your team is thriving.

Also, promote the care-centric culture you've created. Make it known on your organization's career page and job postings your workplace is one where mental health and self-care are respected and supported, and that flexibility is both provided and honored.

Remote work and flexibility aren't the only ways you can drive staff retention. If you're struggling with staffing challenges, you're not alone. See how you can overcome these ongoing hurdles with our staffing challenges ebook.

“It's difficult to let go of your team and allow remote work. But that added flexibility could make a big difference, both in coverage and general accommodation. It's also important to note that remote doesn't solve every problem, and in some cases, it's easier to fail at being there for your team. As leaders, especially ones managing remote or flex teams, we have to make an extra effort to check in on our teams and ensure they're practicing self-care and thriving.”



AMY RAYMOND

VP of Revenue Cycle Operations at AKASA



Make staffing challenges a thing of the past.



GET SOLUTIONS

Take Eye Breaks

Your team is looking at computers and EHRs all day, parsing through hundreds of claims and lines of data. Computer monitors and other [screens are tough on the eyes](#) and can induce migraines, ocular issues, and more.

It's important people take eye breaks and look away from their screens. A good general practice is the 20/20/20 rule: **look at something 20 feet away for 20 seconds every 20 minutes.** Put this in your onboarding handbooks, practice it yourself, and remind your team to do it as well.

If possible, set a recurring reminder to take eye breaks at every workstation.

These breaks only take 20 seconds and go a long way toward preventing migraines. There's no getting around extensive computer use within healthcare operations, but you can get around the eyestrain they cause.

Reduce eye strain with 20/20/20

- Every **20** minutes
- Look at something **20** feet away
- For **20** seconds



“Lead by being seen. It seems like it’s something that’s so easy and small, but it literally makes all the difference to your staff. Connect with your team, ask them questions, and show that you care. Show them that you care about mental health and are prioritizing it for yourself. It can mean the difference between a make or break. When you ask people why they’ve left a role, it often comes down to leadership.”



LARNIE BOYD

Senior Manager of Revenue Cycle Operations at AKASA

Set the Right Example

All of these solutions will mean nothing if you’re not prioritizing your own mental health.

As a leader in your space, you have the opportunity to practice what you preach and set a good example for your team. Emphasize quality self-care — take walks, clean your workspace, praise others, be flexible — and encourage your team to do the same. Setting the right example can go a long way toward giving others the confidence to follow the many care guidelines you lay out.

Being a revenue cycle leader right now isn’t easy. You’re facing uphill battles with staffing, rising denials, increasingly complex regulations, and more. Don’t burn out. Prioritize your mental health, and your team and career will thank you.

Free Up Resources and Find Breathing Room With Automation

Your team is very likely facing more work than they can reasonably handle on any given day. This isn't uncommon, given the usual staffing challenges rooted in margins and churn, and the pandemic exacerbating new and old problems alike.

Self-care and building a workplace that's supportive of well-being are both great, but you're still faced with the ongoing staffing crisis and potential overworking of your team.

Automation can help.

"If everyone on your team is unexpectedly out, nothing gets done. If you only have one person working a payer and they have to be out, nothing gets done. You can spread the work around, but that impacts the rest of the team's productivity. If you have automation in place, the baseline is suddenly a lot higher. Those workflows are always getting done thanks to technology."



AMY RAYMOND
VP of Revenue Cycle Operations at AKASA



"In healthcare, your team is your best, most important resource. Now, ask yourself what resources and solutions you can bring in to take the onus off your team.

Many leaders are turning to automation, and for good reason. Automation allows them to streamline the time-consuming, mundane work, freeing their staff up to do more interesting and complex tasks.

When you're automating these tasks, you can readjust workloads and allow your staff to work at the top of their skill set, while empowering them to do work they love. This can do wonders for employee engagement, satisfaction, retention, burnout, and above all else — mental health."



BEN BEADLE-RYBY
Co-founder of AKASA

Automating as much of the revenue cycle as possible frees up your team and curbs the risk of overworking your staff. Instead of doing the mundane, time-consuming tasks that contribute to burnout and mental health challenges, your staff can focus on more engaging work and even patient-focused interactions.

Think of automation as a team of virtual full-time employees, bringing numerous benefits:

- Automation works through queues even when employees are out, preventing backlogs
- Workloads are more manageable for existing employees, reducing burnout and improving work/life balance
- Automation won't churn, resulting in a more stable headcount and realistic expectations for the people on your team
- Employees have more opportunities to use time off and utilize benefits, as automation is scalable and quicker to implement than hiring and training new employees

At AKASA, our technology is built on a foundation of computer vision-based robotic process automation (RPA) and enhanced with the same artificial intelligence and machine learning that makes self-driving cars possible — with support from our team of revenue cycle experts. Our company is purpose-built for the revenue cycle, so we understand the challenges and struggles you face.

When you work with AKASA, the work gets done.





Thanks to the pandemic, most healthcare organizations now have conversations around remote work and the importance of providing flexibility. These things are obviously important. But the conversation we're not having centers around the hard fact that flexibility doesn't automatically translate to improved mental health or more self-care.

As managers and leaders in the revenue cycle, we need to do more than notice that our employees are trying to balance work, kids at home because of illness, an environment with a looser start and end time, and so on. Our teams are struggling. And we may not realize it. We need to think about what our employees are actually going through and provide them the support and tools they need — to not only succeed but thrive.

It takes time and energy to build a workplace where mental wellness and self-care are prioritized. There's no single path to successfully creating a healthy workplace, nor is it the kind of problem you address by simply throwing tools at it. But with enough time and a thought-out plan, you can build a workplace that prioritizes mental wellness and self-care in healthcare."



AMY RAYMOND

VP of Revenue Cycle Operations
at AKASA



Your team deserves the greatest workplace possible. AKASA can help you create an environment that sets your workflows, people, and organization up for success.

Want to learn how AKASA and automation can help your revenue cycle team?

- Email us at: UPDATES@AKASA.COM