



**LAYING A STRONG FOUNDATION:
BEST PRACTICES FOR IMPLEMENTING
RCM AUTOMATION**

EXECUTIVES WEIGH IN ON CURRENT CHALLENGES IN HEALTHCARE AND HOW TO OVERCOME THEM WITH AUTOMATION.

Automation can streamline complex revenue cycle management workflows and save RCM staff valuable time. But the wrong kind of automation, or a botched rollout, can result in a number of pain points.

As one executive experienced with bot-based automation:

“Bots all over the place! It’s easy for them to get messed up when you make changes in your system,” said the chief revenue cycle officer for a 10-hospital health system based in the Mid-Atlantic U.S. **“You end up having a bunch of bot herders that have to keep track of these things and make sure they continue to work.”**

During an advisory call sponsored by AKASA and hosted by *Becker’s Hospital Review*, healthcare RCM leaders discussed best practices for improving workflows, organizational efficiency, the patient experience and more through automation.

Here are five key takeaways from their conversation:



KEY

TAKEAWAYS

1

Choose the right kind of automation for organizational goals

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Pick the right workflow for automation

3

Expand perspective of ROI automation

4

Follow implementation best practices

5

Don't neglect the role of change management

1. Choose the right kind of automation for organizational goals

It's important for hospital leaders to know the limitations of the solution and technology they're looking at before making a decision.

Many providers use robotic process automation (RPA), which is great for linear tasks but struggles with complex workflows. A revenue cycle executive for an eight-hospital health system based in the Northwest shares that RPA maintenance often presents challenges.

"When we're interacting with external parties, their website changes, a field moves, and suddenly the RPA breaks," she said.

Automation powered by machine learning and artificial intelligence is where many healthcare leaders are moving, as it has learning and decision-making capabilities and more resilience than RPA.

"As next steps for us, we're really working to put some AI into our automation exercises," said a revenue cycle vice president for a nonprofit, integrated healthcare delivery organization based on the West Coast.

"But right now we've pretty much been in the standard bot capabilities without learning or decision making."

2. Pick the right workflow for automation

It's important to know which processes are suitable for automation. Attendees were polled about which RCM workflows they automate, and the top results were: eligibility checks, scheduling/registration, prior authorization, claim edits, and coding — all great fits for automation.

Most RPA happening in the revenue cycle today is concentrated in the upfront patient access and financial clearance realm, including eligibility, financial clearance and prior authorization (although the prior auth process continues to resist full automation).

In the middle revenue cycle, which includes clinical documentation and coding, automation is less advanced compared to other industries. In the business office stage, which encompasses claims status and claims edits, automation is virtually table stakes.

The successful integration of automation into the revenue cycle requires leaders to identify what processes should be automated and what tasks staff will still be directly responsible for. Then leaders can focus on what comes next.

"The next frontier for automation is, 'How do you automate denials management? How do you automate appeals? How do you automate re-bills to appropriate payers?'" said Ben Beadle-Ryby, co-founder at AKASA.

3. Expand perspective of ROI for automation

Getting the most out of RCM automation, and measuring it, requires a new perspective on return on investment. These three focus areas can help organizations better capture automation's value:

1. **Redeployed resources:** These are the workflows and initiatives RCM teams can focus on post-automation.

"Can we redeploy those staff resources to an area that maybe can't be automated that will generate value?" said a VP of revenue cycle for a 12-hospital health system based in the Midwest.

"We've got fixed budgets, and it's hard to bring new dollars into our operations. We've used automation as a way to fund other things we wanted to do so we could redeploy those resources."

2. **Improved employee experience:** Consider automating areas with the greatest employee impact to reduce burnout.
3. **Increased revenue:** Use automation to eliminate the most repetitive tasks rife with errors, which can help reduce write-offs and lost revenue.



4. Follow implementation best practices

Health systems can increase chances of a smooth implementation and post-launch success with these best practices:

- 1. Pilot automation:** Overcome apprehension around automation by starting small with a pilot project. “Do it in small pilots,” said the revenue cycle VP based in the Midwest. “Let staff be a part of the testing process so they can see it working.”
- 2. Measure processes before and after:** Determine how long it takes for a person to do a task. This benchmarks the task and ensures you have the right tools in place to track the process. To get a post-automation comparison, leaders can “look at the level of effort for the development time and take into consideration the shelf life of the bot,” said the West Coast revenue cycle VP.
- 3. Involve your team:** Pull in the right stakeholders when planning automation, including RCM teams on the ground. This can assuage the fears staff may have around automation and work through any non-automation matters, such as unions.

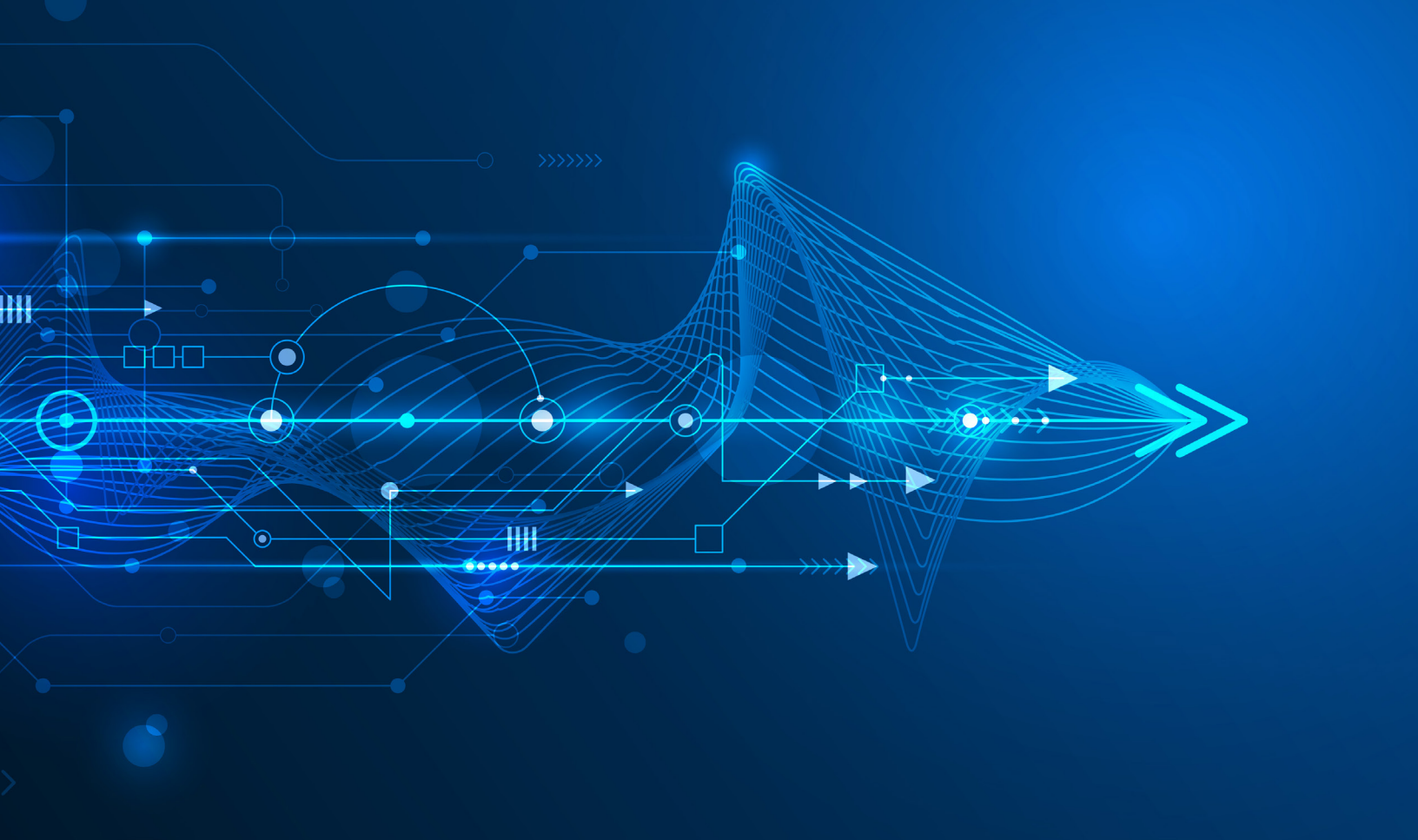
5. Don't neglect the role of change management

“Jobs change as a result of automation,” said the chief revenue cycle officer based in the Mid-Atlantic. “It’s not only that simple jobs disappear. It’s that you need different

kinds of people, different kinds of skills to take advantage of the things that you’ve set up and learned. I’ve used that as a way of reassuring my teams, ‘Don’t worry, you’re safe.’”

Change management is key to successful RCM automation. Involve your team in the discussion when examining workflows and determining where people can shift priorities. This allows you to get as much value as possible out of automation while also elevating your staff to more meaningful work.

“Engage teams early on with what you’re doing and how you’re doing it,” said Amy Raymond, VP of revenue cycle operations at AKASA. “This helps with adoption and makes people feel like they’re part of the process, as opposed to them simply reacting to something happening, which instantly creates fear.”



Reaching new heights with RCM automation

Automation is essential for healthcare organizations wanting to thrive in today's environment. Plan ahead, take the time and align with a trusted AI-powered automation vendor to ensure success — this year and beyond.

"One of the universal conclusions that almost every CFO and VP of revenue cycle has come to is that automation will play a key role in the future state revenue cycle," Mr. Beadle-Ryby said. "That is only going to increase over time as automation capabilities increase, allowing us to address more comprehensive and more complex workflows."

[Schedule a consultation](#) to learn how AKASA can help your organization streamline complex workflows and elevate staff today.



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