

CASE STUDY

IL098: Paramedic Billing Service - August 2007

**Paramedic Billing Services, a division of
Metro Paramedic Services, Inc.
395 W. Lake St, Elmhurst, Illinois 60126
(630) 530-2991**

As companies grow larger, the need to manage and automate more information increases. Technology and process, thus, tend to also become increasingly important. Paramedic Billing Services, Inc. (PBS) has been in existence for 17 years and as the company grew, issues with their billing software began to arise and necessitate some type of resolution to allow PBS to continue their operations smoothly. PBS thoroughly researched their options and made changes that have resulted in improvements in their technology and processes, which have allowed them to operate more efficiently and effectively.

Company History

In 1959, accident victims in DuPage County (Chicagoland, IL area) were transported to the hospital in converted hearses run by funeral homes. If the nearest funeral home had a wake or funeral in progress, the police would have to call another mortuary until an available vehicle could be located. When a vehicle finally arrived, the driver may not have known enough first aid to stop the bleeding. He merely got the victim to the hospital as quickly as possible. There were no levels of emergency medical services in 1959. As the demand for immediate response grew and medical technology advanced, Superior Ambulance, headquartered in Elmhurst, Illinois started the first emergency ambulance service in DuPage County. David Hill Jr. and his wife Blanche started Superior Ambulance from their Bellwood home. Superior Ambulance became the foremost provider for suburban Cook and DuPage Counties. During the first 12 months of operation, Superior transported over 300 patients.

In 1981, David Hill III, son of Blanche and Dave Jr. became president, continuing his family's tradition in setting the standards in the ambulance industry. Five years later in 1986, Metro Paramedic Services, Inc. was founded. Metro is a contract emergency medical service providing paramedics, paramedic firefighters, rescue diver paramedics, ambulances and emergency medical equipment to rural, urban, and suburban communities and fire protection districts, as well as sports facilities and private industry.

In 1990, David Hill and Jim Clark, President of Metro Paramedic Services, founded Paramedic Billing Services, Inc. (PBS) to meet the needs of a new industry. PBS utilizes 47 years of billing experience to serve over 65 municipalities and fire protection districts.

Technology used at PBS

As PBS grew in number of customers and transactions, the data that their billing system needed to process also grew. The billing program began to take longer to complete each transaction and did not allow for some of the functionality needed to efficiently handle the growing operations. PBS began to research the EMS billing software market for better options and made a very diligent effort to manage any changes of programs or processes holistically, taking into account all aspects of the company's operations.

In April of 2006, PBS switched their billing software over to *Sweet-Billing* and after more than one year on the Sweet program, Vice President, Ann Brandl, reported that everything is going "extremely well" with Ortivus and the *Sweet-Billing* program. "Revenue has gone up, FTEs (full-time employees) have gone down and average income per call has gone up," reports Brandl.

When asked for the rationale behind the trends that she noted, Brandl explained that the *Sweet-Billing* program is an easier system allowing for the automation of billing processes, thereby involving less human intervention.

One key management decision that was implemented when the decision to switch billing programs was made was the hiring of an Information Systems (IS) specialist, Robert Perez, who could offer an “outsider’s perspective” into the business operations.

Perez was hired in February 2006, primarily for the initial set up and integration of the *Sweet-Billing* system into the PBS operations. Because a billing system can have such an impact on the revenue stream of a business, as well as the number of staff required in the billing department, it was wisely recognized that hiring the right person who could analyze this important aspect of the business with a “fresh set of eyes” and be equipped to implement the recommendations would yield important gains for PBS. Perez’s background is in Computer IS with a database concentration. He had been working with a smaller company prior to moving to PBS.

Working very closely to resolve and revamp issues and processes, Perez helped streamline the billing process at PBS; with his help and the *Sweet-Billing* tool, PBS has effectively achieved same-day billing. Perez also credits Hal Brown, his supervisor, with many of the improvements in the billing portion of operations at PBS. Automating many of the processes is one of the major strategies that Perez has employed at PBS. For example, Perez utilized the ASCII Import module to automate the billing for the personal alarm portion of their business. Approximately 2,000 bills needed to be sent out each quarter for this service, which used to be manually completed on a typewriter. Perez utilized the *Sweet-Billing* ASCII Import module to automate these bills each quarter, helping free up employees to focus on other things, like accounts receivables.

Wesley VanValkenburg is the Billing Manager for PBS who provided some additional examples of how the *Sweet-Billing* system has helped increase revenue and free up time for the billing staff.

“Overall, we’ve had a good experience with the system.” VanValkenburg said. “The *Sweet-Billing* system is flexible and allows us to lock out charges and suppress information that is not needed so that there are fewer errors in selecting an incorrect piece of data. We are also able to do customization with reports; the report generator in the *Sweet-Billing* system is simple enough that I can do 90% of the reports myself without needing to get help from Robert Perez (IT Specialist) or use Crystal Reports. We do a lot of custom reports for our customers. We’ve also identified some typical repeated errors that we have been able to report on so that they can be fixed before the bill ‘goes out the door.’ This has helped reduce our accounts receivable time, and together with the faster speed of the system allowing our billing staff to work at a quicker pace, we are able to end our 180-day cycle without any backlogged accounts receivable.”

VanValkenburg said that in the past they had also experienced issues with claims not being sent to the insurance carriers. This issue has also been resolved with the *Sweet-Billing* system. “*Sweet-Billing* enables cross checks to make sure necessary fields are matching, as well as being able to flag other areas, such as private payor insurance,” VanValkenburg explained when detailing some of the differences between the past system and the current *Sweet* system. “EZ Review is also a good tool that allows us to work with live data and eliminate printed reports when we are reviewing and analyzing claims and other information. A few seconds per item reviewed goes a long way to save time.”

One other area that VanValkenburg mentioned as contributing to the increased revenue that has accompanied the organization’s implementation of the *Sweet-Billing* system was the ability of the system to handle Medicare Secondaries. In the past, PBS was not able to accommodate for Medicare Secondaries, therefore, none were getting paid. “This is a lot easier with *Sweet-Billing*,” said Wesley. “We have a lot of patients in this category.”



PBS continues to maintain good communication with Ortivus, which helps ensure smooth operations. VanValkenburg echoed the same comments that have been stated by others in PBS, including Brandl and Perez, which attest to the excellent training and support that Ortivus provided and continues to provide. Steve Johnson, Director of Sweet Billing Services, was mentioned as valuable because of his experience in the billing service industry, as well as his familiarity with and day-to-day use of the Sweet applications. Another example of a key management decision that has impacted the success of the Sweet product implementation was PBS's election to purchase the level of Ortivus support that entitles them to an Ortivus Project Manager. This option is offered to any account with multiple products or services large enough to benefit from a single contact point that can coordinate and manage the many aspects and details involved in such scenarios. Perez commented on PBS's Ortivus support project manager: "Ann Bodensteiner is our first and primary contact when we have any questions. She's straight forward, and will tell us if she doesn't have an exact answer. When that occurs she's quick to bring in the developer, programmer whoever it takes to solve the problem. Many times we call her just to guide us through a scenario or problem to find the corrective action."

The level of commitment that PBS has devoted to improving the efficiency and effectiveness for the billing system has accounted for a significant portion of the positive results. Clearly, the excellent management of objectives, expectations, and placing key resources in the proper places has played an important role in the resulting successes shown in business operations and bottom line over the past year. According to Brandl, the outlook for future plans involves incorporating more of the Sweet software into their business operations to further increase operational efficiencies and business effectiveness. Ortivus has greatly appreciated the level of commitment and communication that has been devoted to the partnership between the two organizations, which has allowed them to partner with Paramedic Billing Services, Inc. in a manner that has developed a mutually beneficial relationship with all parties involved, including the end customer of PBS.

Contact

Ortivus:

Karla Hageman, Senior Account Manager
800.537.3927
sales@ortivusna.com