

How Carle Health modernized a well-established CDI program and captured \$19.5M in revenue

Carle Health's key players



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Challenge

Having a clinical documentation integrity (CDI) program as well-established as Carle Health's isn't an easy feat.

It takes experienced leaders, CDI nurses who have been with the program for years, and a disciplined approach to performance management. Across its eight-hospital system, Carle Health's team regularly tracked operational metrics with revenue cycle leadership, such as case mix index (CMI), review and re-review rates, query volume, and more.

Even with this sophistication, the Carle Health team wasn't immune to the pressures many of their peer institutions were facing. Coding and documentation needs continued to become more complex, and Carle Health's existing CDI tools and workflows were helping prioritize cases, but the work of reviewing the chart was only becoming more burdensome.

"We knew our technology needed a 'facelift' of sorts," explained Rebecca Hall, Carle Health's Director of Health Information Management (HIM), Coding and CDI. "We needed to support our strong CDI team without replacing them by modernizing our workflows, and we thought the solution might come from AI."

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REBECCA HALL
DIRECTOR OF HEALTH INFORMATION
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The team was tough on potential vendors, asking hard questions about ROI and performance. Ultimately they chose to remove a legacy software solution and redesign the CDI program with AI as a key player alongside their team — without replacing existing CDI expertise.

Solution

Carle Health's CDI Manager wanted to give their team the tools they needed to ensure they were eliminating manual work and practicing at the top of their licenses. The AI would need to work through the sheer volume of data in their charts, and provide the evidence for her team to validate.

While looking for an AI solution that met their criteria, Carle Health found SmarterDx. They learned that the company's flagship product, SmarterPrebill™, reviews patient charts before final billing and identifies potential missing or incorrect diagnoses for CDI and coding teams to evaluate — helping specialists focus their time on the cases where clinical judgment matters most.

That was exactly what Carle Health envisioned for its new CDI foundation. With SmarterPrebill, Carle Health's CDI team wouldn't have to pick and choose which charts could get an expert deep dive. The clinical AI behind SmarterPrebill would step in and take care of that work.

And, because it was designed by physician-data scientists, the Carle Health team had confidence in the tool's ability to accurately and appropriately surface the charts that actually required the expertise of CDI review and would impact reimbursement and quality metrics.

Solution (cont.)

Carle Health’s VP of HIM and Revenue Cycle Systems, Debbie Sarantopoulos-Palese, explained why SmarterPrebill was exactly the type of tool they needed to help modernize their CDI operations: “The old model asked CDI teams to find needles in haystacks. SmarterPrebill helps point them to the haystacks most likely to matter.”

Results

Sarantopoulos-Palese wasn’t wrong. Since Carle Health adopted SmarterPrebill in October 2024, they’ve captured \$19.5 million in revenue impact across nearly 12,000 encounters.

And the impacts of clinical AI go beyond financial success. SmarterPrebill surfaced an average of 116 quality measures per month, including HCCs, ROM, and Elixhauser readmission and mortality recommendations. Surfacing these measures for the team to review helps ensure documentation reflects patient risk and care complexity — supporting fair quality benchmarking, risk adjustment, and public reporting in addition to fair reimbursement.

For Carle Health, the results validate the premise behind its CDI transformation: the organization did not need to replace experienced CDI professionals. It needed to equip them with clinical AI that could review more broadly, surface more meaningful opportunities.

• SPOTLIGHT ON

Carle Health’s keys to success

\$19.5M

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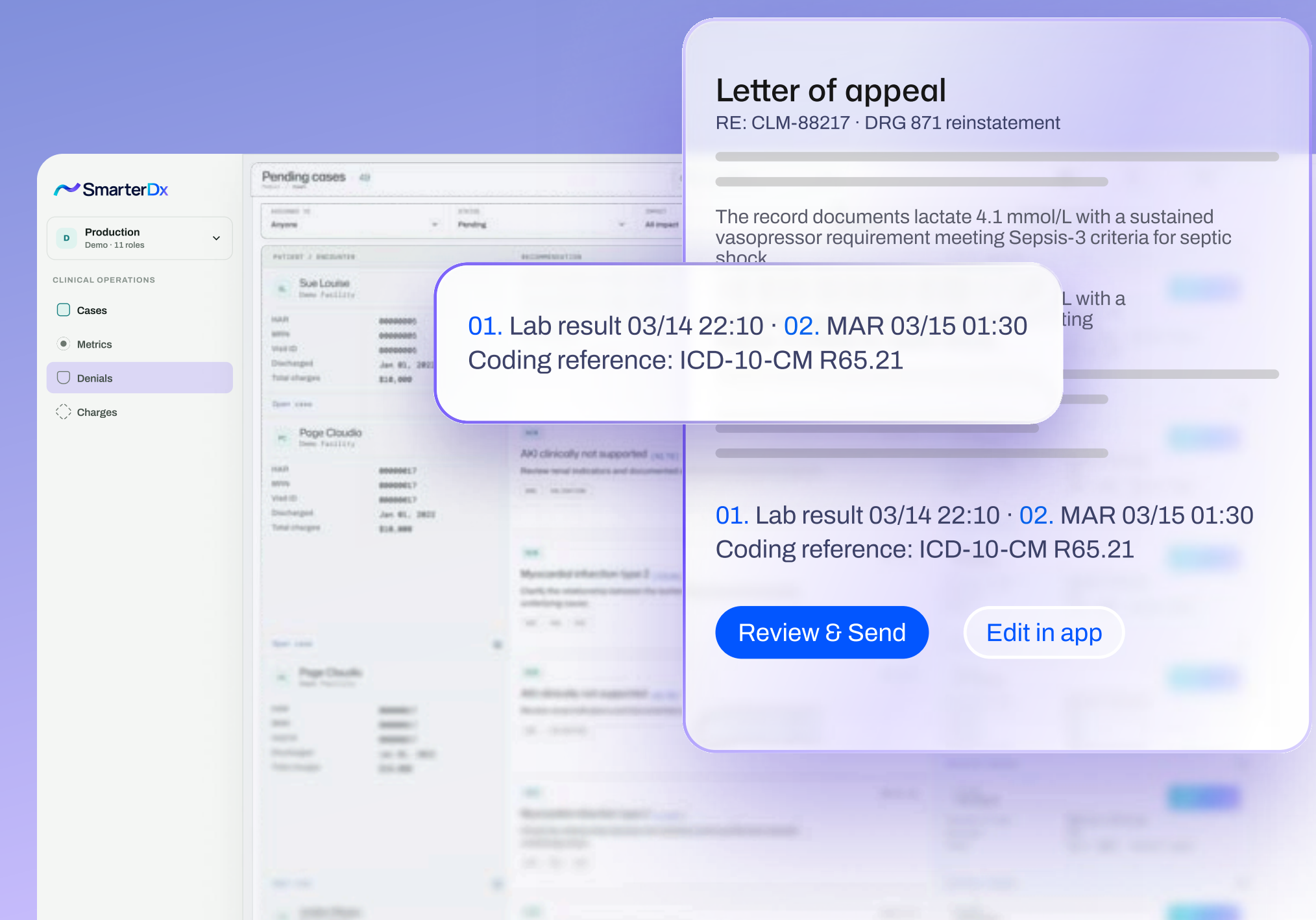


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What’s next

With the success of SmarterPrebill, the Carle Health team began looking into other ways to take advantage of SmarterDx’s foundational clinical AI. With DRG downgrades and medical necessity denials skyrocketing, SmarterDenials™ felt like a natural fit. By using clinical AI to turn complex case evidence into targeted, high-impact appeal letters, they can fight back those denials faster — ultimately recovering more revenue with less friction.



To learn more about how SmarterDx can help your health system, visit