



FROM AUDIT FINDINGS TO MEASURABLE IMPROVEMENTS THROUGH COMPLIANCE

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Seeing audits through a new lens Every audit tells a unique story of missed opportunities and even victories that have gone unnoticed. Too often, audits are seen as punitive, creating anxiety across the organization. The question is not whether you will be audited, it's when. What if we reframed this narrative and instead viewed audits as powerful tools to propel your organization forward? The fact is, every audit is a chance to strengthen processes, elevate documentation standards, and build a culture of accountability. By interpreting findings in this manner, organizations can turn scrutiny into strategy and transform audit results into long-term success.

Leveraging audit findings for growth

Both internal and external audits offer a snapshot of where processes stand today and a roadmap for where improvements must happen

tomorrow. Rather than rush to fix what you believe to be the problem, take a step back and ask the following questions: What is this audit *really* telling us? Do the results point to an oversight or a larger issue? Documenting not only what went wrong but also what went *right* can highlight areas of strength to build upon. When taking this approach, your goal becomes clear: to consistently support accuracy, integrity, and financial stability.

Audits also help leadership tell the story of progress to the governing bodies and payers. Being able to demonstrate trend data over time, such as reductions in denial rates, builds confidence in your compliance program and can influence reimbursement negotiations. Reporting these metrics regularly to regulatory organizations ensures continued visibility and resource support.

Interpreting audit findings: Reading between the lines

Every auditor provides a report outlining the scope, findings, and recommendations of the audit performed. Now with this map in hand, you can find the buried treasure. The first step is to move past the numbers and uncover the meaning. Analyze patterns to expose the *why*. Identify whether the errors are isolated or widespread. Convert each root cause into a corrective action with an owner, due date, and success metric. This ensures accountability as well as a way to monitor key performance indicators going forward. Score the severity of each error to further categorize the level of risk to your organization. For example, a targeted audit by a commercial payer reveals that your practice has been reimbursed for claims that were not medically necessary. Since medical necessity is supported by proper documentation of the patient's condition, your focus should now shift to completeness of documentation. A close look at templates currently in use and query opportunities can be employed here. This valuable insight will help with clinician education.

Implementing change: Insight shifts to action

Knowing your areas of risk is only half the battle; the other half is acting on them. Addressing findings requires a structured approach that emphasizes collaboration, accountability, and follow-through. Start by prioritizing the risk and tackling high-impact areas first. This is a perfect time to explore automating parts of your processes to reduce administrative burden and improve workflows. Automation is your silent partner, running in the background, always ensuring that

consistent checks and balances are occurring. Fully understanding your current electronic health record's capabilities and maximizing underused tools you are already paying for but may not be utilizing will prove helpful. Data analytics and reporting are powerful tools that every practice should be leveraging.

The success of any corrective action depends on all parties taking ownership. Leaders should close the loop by reporting back to staff on what has changed, why it was necessary, and how it will be measured. This transparency reinforces accountability. When people see the results of their efforts, engagement and ownership naturally increase.

Implementing quick wins, such as front office checklists, job aids to clarify required steps in your revenue cycle process, and payer cheat sheets, keeps valuable information at the ready. Even creating a simple dashboard that is shared across the organization will supply everyone with the same information in real-time. This is also a great place to announce and celebrate wins with your team, reinforcing the culture.

Partnering with external compliance or auditing professionals can provide objective insight. A third-party perspective often reveals inefficiencies that internal teams have grown accustomed to. They can benchmark performance against other practices of the same specialty. Also, take this opportunity to route the more complicated charts for additional scrutiny by professionals with more extensive expertise.

The key to true transformation in your compliance posture happens when corrective action is a natural part of daily business. Leadership can further encourage progress by sharing trends and

acknowledging measurable improvements achieved through teamwork. This fosters a sense of shared responsibility at every level of the organization.

Turning audits into education

Education turns compliance into empowerment, positioning coders and billers as confident, informed professionals who see themselves as vital team members. Consider developing training that is transparent and consistent so that all internal stakeholders feel supported. Incorporating storytelling into education can make audit data more relatable. Instead of presenting errors in isolation, walk teams through the patient's journey and show how each documentation or coding decision affects that story. Connecting data to patient care helps staff understand the *why* behind compliance, transforming training from task-based to purpose-driven learning. Incorporate the recent audit findings into ongoing training. Employ micro-learning such as 10-15-minute huddles with just two examples highlighting the main points. Create a OneNote that centralizes all job aids, recorded presentations, and buddy lists to make sure that when staff are out on leave, nothing falls through the cracks.

Audit reports do more than list errors. They illuminate how people, processes, technology, and policies interact in real life. Where are handoffs breaking down? During registration, provider documentation, code selection, or patient financial services? Identifying deficiencies can provide leadership with the necessary catalyst for change. When leadership is consistent, trust is built, and respect is earned. Over time, this method will transform

compliance into a part of your organization's culture.

Preparing for the future: Audits building a culture of compliance

A strong compliance program is the best defense against exposure to risk and revenue leakage. Prepare for the next audit on purpose. A proactive compliance culture thrives when leadership models transparency. Encourage department managers to include compliance goals in their performance reviews and celebrate milestones, such as achieving three months of continuous accuracy above 95% on all claims or maintaining claim rejection rates of less than 2%. This creates positive reinforcement and integrates compliance into daily operations rather than viewing it as yet another task.

Track the corrective actions you have implemented with strategic monitoring practices. Perform internal audits monthly using a smaller sample size to obtain a snapshot of progress that can be used to reward staff and ensure you are on the right track. The goal is to engage every member of the team. Each department plays a key role in the success of the revenue cycle, and, in my experience, this is where

the ball is dropped because staff are not aware of how their actions affect the whole organization. Communication in this new hybrid world emphasizes why clarity matters. It is easier for employees to feel completely disconnected from the organization while working from home. By staying visible to your remote staff, you can quickly lean into what is accelerating their adoption of changes.

Continuous monitoring is the bridge between today's audit and tomorrow's success. Establish a cadence for review, monthly internal checks, quarterly summaries, and an annual compliance report that synthesizes lessons learned. This continuous oversight prevents audit findings from fading after the initial correction, positioning compliance as an ongoing conversation rather than a one-time event.

The positive impact of audit findings far outweighs the negative. When organizations embrace compliance, patient trust also deepens. Caring for patients is why we all have careers in the healthcare industry. Without them, we are out of business. Each audit becomes a feedback loop that drives smarter decisions, reinforces organizational resilience,

and ultimately impacts healthier patient outcomes. Trusting this process in time will position your organization's compliance plan as the trusted adviser guiding operational excellence.

Reputation, readiness, and results

An organization's reputation in healthcare is built on trust. Trust in the accuracy of its data, the integrity of its billing practices, and the quality of its care. Poor audit outcomes can erode that trust quickly, affecting everything from payer relationships to public perception. By correctly interpreting audit findings, acting on them with purpose, and aligning corrective actions with operational goals, your organization can strengthen compliance while enhancing efficiency. Shifting the mindset from audits being a bad word to audits being validation of your organization's progress is success in my book. Audits reveal each chapter of your organization's story; be intentional in how you write your next paragraph. By leading with integrity and measurable action, you ensure that every chapter demonstrates growth, accountability, and an unwavering commitment to quality care. ^{CT}

Takeaways

- ◆ Audits reveal opportunities for real growth and improvement.
- ◆ Leverage data analytics and process automation.
- ◆ Integrate your compliance plan into every role at your organization.
- ◆ Utilize external auditors to gain a fresh perspective.
- ◆ Remain proactive with a positive attitude.