

# Is It Time to Allow Revenue Cycle Employees to Telecommute?



## Abstract

In the coming years, managing revenue cycle employees from their homes might be normal business practice for many healthcare providers. As a result, directors of patient financial services may find themselves forced to respond to an all-new set of needs and concerns from their staffs. This report explains what telecommuting is, describes the pros and cons of telecommuting, and describes the challenges of managing revenue cycle employees working from home.

## INTRODUCTION

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One common misconception pertaining to the telecommuting worker is "the slacker" or someone who enjoys the luxuries of home while casually attending to their responsibilities. However, studies have found that telecommuters dedicate more work hours than traditional office-based workers.

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### The Pros: What's Great About Telecommuting Work

The benefits, or pros, of retaining employees who work from home range from a higher level of productivity, to reduced office-related expenses. Opening a revenue cycle department to include the option for telecommuting workers results in a much expanded talent pool. If the best candidates that do not live within commuting distance to the office and are not willing to relocate, your department can still benefit from their skills, as they elect to work from home. This can be particular benefit to rural hospitals, which have faced the challenge of seeking and retaining local staff.

**Additional Pros:** Many believe that working from home results in higher productivity. This is due to the fact that there is a fair distance from office politics, socializing, and other such distractions.

Commute time is diminished to zero. This saves the employee hundreds of dollars a year in travel expenses and also greatly reduces stress levels. The hour to get ready and commute is directed toward project management or team conversations.

Telecommuting also offers flexibility for working parents. Quality of life is much improved due to increased family time as well as increased work time.

Employers who offer telecommuting opportunities appear to be more appealing to potential recruits and new employees and, additionally, reduce the turnover rate of existing employees. Offering hospital workers the ability to work from home can be a powerful morale booster.

Freelancers often have profiles on one or more job boards or associations. An organization that relies on flex teams will often work with these boards to source, vet and hire freelancers for short- and long-term contracts. This growing cohort of immensely skilled workers is an untapped pool of talent that can help organizations remain competitive in today's economy and meet market demands. (They provide the brain power without the overhead.)

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### The Cons: Challenges of Telecommuting Work Arrangements

It can be a challenge to create an atmosphere of free-flowing communication when workers are out of the office. For instance, it can be more complicated to share viewing materials in a meeting, or even handling a straightforward interaction with a telecommuting worker in the same way you would with an in-office employee.

While managing remote staff can contain additional challenges, thoughtful planning, clearly communicated expectations, and a system of monitoring can plant the seeds for high productivity and quality of reviews.

All PHI must be encrypted before being transmitted. This can either be through the healthcare facility's Intranet or using the internet email encryption.

HIPAA primary and secondary rules do not prohibit remote access, but they do require that organizations implement appropriate safeguards to ensure the privacy and security of protected health information (PHI).

A remote manager's worst nightmare is the idea that an employee is running personal errands on the company dime.

Remote employees do not get the same recognition as their in office counterparts. Ideas suffer from lack of feedback and brainstorming that occur at the office.

Individuals who are not around each other long enough tend not to collaborate on ideas naturally.

## Tips for Managing Remote Employees

- Establish productivity goals. As a revenue cycle manager, once you provide instructions on goals and objectives, take a step back and have faith that the employee is capable of fulfilling his or her duties. Your focus should be on setting goals for productivity as well as results and outcomes.
- Ensure employees can get in touch in a variety of ways including: HD video conferencing (meetings on Skype or in Outlook), phone meetings, or even simple IM chatting or emailing. This is to ensure employees have an ease of communication, spanning assignment-related issues to personal ones.
- Keep tabs on workers to ensure what they are doing. Ensure your employees keep confidential personal health information in a secure location.
- Improve accountability by establishing the expectation that remote workers clock in and clock out, attend video meetings, and copy you when submitting work assignments.
- Create a clear policy on teleworking that outlines the risks that remote workers have. Emphasize how to reduce the risks.
- Deploy consistent security measures. Implement basic security measures for laptops such as full disk encryption, malicious software protection, VPN, firewall, and content filtering.
- Review VPN logs to discern what remote employees are spending their time on.
- Provide guidance, communicate, and take responsibility to managing workers.
- Coordinate with Human Resources to ensure workers' compensation will cover your employees in the home environment. Develop workstation design guidelines and offer home inspection.
- Ask workers to sign a written telecommuting agreement if they will be working from home. Automate end-user security protocols, giving your IT department complete access to telecommuting computers in the network. Provide administrators the ability to control and manage telecommuting computers from a virtual desktop..
- Prevent users from bypassing password protection in the event a laptop is lost or stolen.

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### The Conclusion

What is of vital importance to remember about managing employees who work from home or in global offices is that, at the end of the day, you are looking for the same exact things from them as you are from your in-office employees: productivity and reliability.

The current generation of workforce optimization suites includes capabilities that help address many of the management challenges created by a telecommuting work force. Workforce optimization solutions can reliably record, monitor, train, coach, support and enhance the skills of at-home revenue cycle employees.

If you've resisted remote working for some or all of your employees – or for yourself – it's time to reconsider. However, without the right tools for the job, you would not be able to properly manage your revenue cycle.





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