Piedmont Community Health Plan Automates Authorizations to Improve Efficiency

Medecision Digital Platform Reduces Turnaround Times by 57%

Piedmont Community Health Plan, a regional health plan based in central Virginia, operates on the principle that your personal physician, not out-of-town insurance administrators, should manage your healthcare. With a strong belief that local knowledge and understanding leads to the most informed decisions, Piedmont fosters close cooperation between local healthcare providers, patients, and employers to deliver medical care that represents the highest standards for quality and efficiency.

Piedmont went live with the Medecision digital platform, Aerial™, in March 2020. Two days later, the office closed and the entire staff went fully remote. In addition to the challenges of managing the business during a pandemic, employees had to overcome the obstacles of learning a new system from home.

The Challenge - Inefficient Authorization Process

Piedmont communicated with its provider network through a home-grown electronic system that enabled basic communication and request submissions, but was never integrated with its medical management platforms. Submissions were often incomplete, so Piedmont would need to follow up via phone to gather details. In addition, all information would need to be manually entered into multiple systems, which was hugely inefficient.

The Solution - Automation Streamlines Workflows and Reduces Turnaround Times

With the Medecision digital platform, authorization requests are automated and integrated directly into Aerial™, with efficient, expedited workflows and auto-approval rules that speed turnaround times and reduce the time and expense associated with more manual processes.

Using Aerial™, Piedmont Has Improved Its Average Turnaround Time By 57%—To Less Than a Day
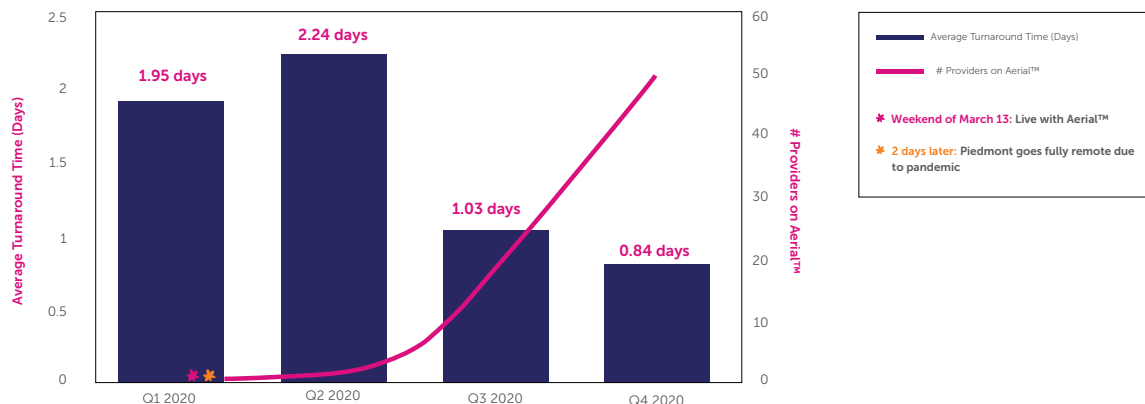
"The turnaround time is my favorite thing about Aerial™," said Terrie Moore, Utilization Review Nurse and Team Lead for Piedmont. *"The queues aren't just sitting out there multiplying, they are actually being addressed as they come in and the providers are telling us that they have noticed and that they like it."*

Automation eliminates manual, error-prone tasks, focusing resources on those authorizations that truly require clinical intervention and freeing staff for more important work.

"Medecision's platform has definitely made us more efficient," said Kenneth Rioux, Utilization Review Clerk and trainer for Piedmont. *"My job has completely changed—now that manual entry is eliminated, I'm able to do so many other projects while still maintaining my core responsibilities. And our providers are wowed that the authorizations go directly to a nurse."*

Efficient Communication Reduces Phone Calls

Aerial™ provides secure, two-way communication between providers and health plans for efficiency. Required fields ensure incoming requests are complete without requiring the back-and-forth communication that delays authorization processing, significantly reducing Piedmont's telephone burden. "With Aerial™, the number of phone calls we receive to check on authorizations has been severely reduced," said Rioux. "We've gone from two clerks on the phone lines at all times with back-to-back calls, to one plus a standby for the rare instances a call is waiting. Having all the required information at the front end has been tremendously helpful for getting authorizations out the door."

This improved efficiency has another benefit—member satisfaction.

"Our members aren't calling as often, because we're turning things around quickly and they have few questions," said Laura Campbell, Director of Medical Management for Piedmont. *"The member isn't sitting there wondering if the authorization is approved and the provider doesn't have to tell them to call the insurance company because they haven't heard back."*

Proven Efficiencies Improve Provider Acceptance and Satisfaction

Piedmont credits its success with Medecision to two things: comprehensive communication and training, and a personal touch that helped providers over small obstacles to expedite adoption and make the program successful out of the gate.

"Improved efficiency has been a standout with our providers—how quickly and efficiently Aerial™ enables us to communicate with them and get authorizations done," said Rioux. "The first thing I tell our providers during training is 'You guys are going to love this. Everything goes so fast.'"

Provider feedback has been positive. "We had one provider that said, 'Terrie, you told me I'm going to like this tool, but I'm only 10%,'" said Moore. "I replied, 'I guarantee you by the end of this phone call, you'll be 100%.' And he was."

Now, 70 provider groups use Aerial™. "Developing good relationships with the provider offices has been key to our success," said Rioux. "Aerial™ enabled us to get everyone involved, and our team has been very responsive. That's had a positive impact on our relationship with those provider offices."

Once providers were on board, the streamlined process and fast response times have ensured acceptance.

What Piedmont's Providers Are Saying

"All of us just love it and the turnaround time is quick!"
— Orthopedic Provider in Virginia

"Awesome, easy-to-use and I like it better than the previous system. I like it and the turnaround time is good."
— Imaging Facility in Virginia

"...having a great time with Aerial™!"
— Piedmont Eye Center

Complimented "the speed" in which requests were processed.
— Gastroenterology Associates

"Really enjoying Aerial™."
— University System Imaging Center in Virginia

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> *"Our providers are impressed with our turnaround time—and that everything is handled in one system without requiring a fax," said Moore. "Providers tell us they enjoy using Aerial™ and they don't have to spend a lot of time on the phone trying to get an authorization."*

The partnership with Medecision—including both ongoing support and materials provided in the online customer community—have also made a difference.

"The support during implementation was really good. It really set our team up to be able to develop that positive relationship with the provider around Aerial™, and really take it to the next level," said Campbell. "Our team felt armed with the information to bring all our provider groups on—which enabled them to be successful in onboarding our providers."

> *"I love working with Medecision," said Rioux. "Our client partner is always there, especially in the early days when we were getting used to the system, and is always quick with a response."*

Best Practices for Provider Onboarding with Aerial™

Piedmont offers the following words of wisdom for bringing providers on board quickly and easily and ensuring provider success when implementing Aerial™.

1. **Communicate** ahead of time so your network knows a new system is coming.

2. **Familiarize yourself with the system**, including the provider view. Understanding what the provider sees is very helpful.

3. **Provide training** that walks providers through how to use Aerial™ and emphasizes the value and benefits Aerial™ will bring them. Piedmont also recorded training for providers who were unable to participate live.

4. **Start small.** Piedmont started with two pilot groups so they weren't overwhelmed by rolling it out to all providers at once.

5. **Leverage training and other resources in the online customer community.** "The customer community really is a go-to place for me, especially when a provider has a question I can't answer," said Moore. "If I can't find an answer in the manual, I can always ask."

6. **After a provider is live on Aerial™, remove access to the old system** to facilitate the transition and ensure consistent usage.

7. **Listen to provider feedback**. You'll be learning as you go, and your provider training will evolve. Listen to them so you know how to better meet their needs.

8. **Assign a dedicated contact person** or two for bringing on providers and answering their questions.

"Delivering a positive experience is not a 'one and done' approach—you need to provide ongoing support for your providers so they feel like they are listened to," said Campbell. "Our team did a great job training and providing timely answers to questions—that really helped with the provider experience."

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