

Learning to Appreciate IT

Clinical staff at a national EAP/MBHO realize the value of technologic solutions

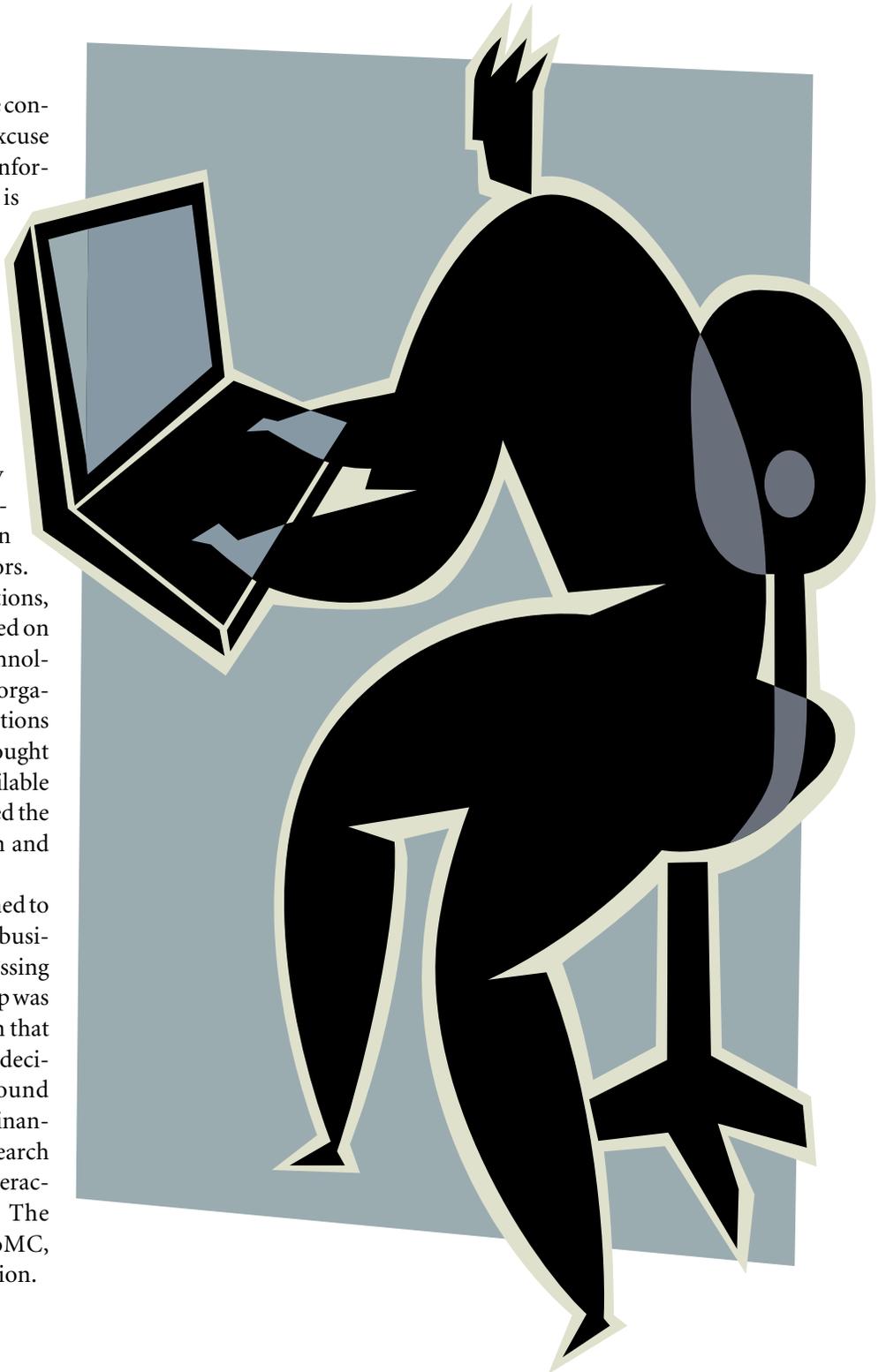
by Marcus Sola

At The Holman Group, we're convinced that there is no excuse for not having good information technology today—it is such a vital tool for achieving our mission.

The Holman Group is a national EAP and managed behavioral healthcare organization (MBHO) that has been active in the field for almost 25 years. Headquartered in Canoga Park, California, the company provides a wide range of managed care solutions and relies on IT to support its clinical endeavors.

Like many similar organizations, The Holman Group initially relied on a customized “homegrown” technology structure. However, as the organization grew and Y2K considerations arose, our management team thought it wise to re-examine other available technology. What we saw clarified the gap between our current system and greater possibilities.

The original system was designed to support the financial side of the business and was proficient at processing claims. But our clinical leadership was looking increasingly for a system that would better support clinical decision making and integrate sound clinical practice with practical financial logic. After considerable research at national conferences and interactions with industry leaders, The Holman Group selected InfoMC, Inc., to provide its new IT solution.



Implementing technology on the clinical side of the business was a challenge. The clinicians performing assessment and case management functions were, for the most part, not comfortable using computers for clinical work. In fact, one psychiatrist boasted that he had never even touched a computer. Like most clinicians, they had been trained to perform highly personal, face-to-face interactions with people in need; at times they saw computers as a hindrance, rather than a valuable tool. The Holman Group, through the persistence of clinical leadership and training from the vendor, worked through this “electronic paradigm shift” and now reaps the benefits of an efficient system, which is responsive to client needs and integrates clinical and financial considerations.

One of the improvements in the new system greatly appreciated by the clinical staff is the ability for users to build their own clinical assessment screens. This allowed paper assessment forms already developed by the clinicians to be translated into the new system, promoting familiarity with the electronic tools. As they grew more comfortable with the new system, clinicians began to generate ideas to improve the system even further. The result of one of these ideas was a new clinical summary screen that enables screening clinicians to quickly review a client’s history as they construct recommendations for level of service and treatment intensity. The Holman Group’s technology team, with input from the clinical staff, easily created this new screen.

Other Holman Group staff benefit from the new technology, as well. Quality Assurance staff greatly appreciate the reports that are available in

real time and customizable to fit the exact specifications of The Holman Group’s clients. These reports have greatly improved internal efficiencies and customer service throughout the organization. On the EAP side of the

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business, where reports are a critical element of the services delivered, the data reporting capabilities provide reports to customers that not only demonstrate EAP utilization, but enhance their ability to manage their employee capital to greater productivity.

Members of the Claims Processing department (Holman’s early adapters to IT) also appreciate the new system. For example, when an individual client needed a service that was not listed specifically in a health plan’s coverage schedule, a claims adjuster had to decide whether to authorize payment for the service; to do so, though, the claims adjusters sometimes had to stop their work and find a case manager to help them make a clinically related decision. This was a particularly difficult role for untrained, nonclinical staff. With the new system, rules are built into the software so these types of decisions are made automatically; the claims adjusters can focus on financial decisions.

Another factor in the acceptance of this system: Although The Holman Group is a comprehensive, national MBHO, there are much larger organizations with which it competes for customers. Executive managers have

come to realize that the new technology allows them to compete with these larger organizations, as its functions and processes are the same and, at times, more efficient than the larger companies’ systems. In short, efficiency equals credibility. With this technologic functionality, The Holman Group can provide full-scale, national services with the increased attention and focus of a smaller company.

The new technology also offers increased ability to fulfill the company’s mission statement, which now receives greater support in day-to-day operations. The technology improves clinical response time, information retrieval for client managers, and claims accuracy. This results in better services for individual clients, stronger support for organizational clients, and improved bottom-line results overall.

The Holman Group plans to continue providing high-quality customer service and clinical resources with the support of modern IT. We are anticipating, sometime in the near future, transitioning to an even more modern .Net system, which would deploy our current software applications over the World Wide Web, allowing increased access and flexibility.

In general, we plan a continuous effort to increase efficiencies through the use of IT solutions. We are confident our customers will reap the benefits. **BHM**

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