Podcast episode transcript: Nina Rachetta and Brinton Frisby

Nina Rachetta: Welcome to the Solventum Inside Angle podcast. My name is Nina Rachetta, product marketing manager for coding automation at Solventum, and I will be your host. Today I am joined by Brinton Frisby, business director for coding automation at Solventum, to discuss the very important topic of coding automation.

Welcome, Brinton.

Brinton Frisby: Hi, Nina. Thanks for having me.

Nina Rachetta: Thank you for being here. So today, I'd like us to really unpack what I think is in everyone's mind in the industry right now, and that is how AI-based solutions tackle the tall order that is having accurate, complete, and compliant final code sets, and what does it take to trust the technology, you know, it's a true partner healthcare organizations.

But first, before we get into it, tell us a little bit about yourself and the work that you have done Solventum.

Brinton Frisby: I'm Brinton Frisby, and I've been here at Solventum for almost 15 years. I think this year is actually my 14th, so about a year away. And I've worked mostly in the R&D department during that time. So I managed the first 360 Encompass development team and we took that through to production and then commercialization and rollout. Some of the most crazy, I would say, years of my life were that 2013, 2014, 2015 professionally with all the work that we did and installing it at as many customer sites as we did in in that amount of time. All thanks to ICD-10 and all the compliance and regulatory requirements that were coming at the whole industry at that time.

I've worked in a number of roles since then in the development department here. I've been the director of development for revenue cycle for about the last nine years. And then leading up to last year when I switched roles and moved into the business development director role for autonomous coding, which is what I have today.

Nina Rachetta: Excellent. Do you think this is kind of like full circle then moment for you from working on what is now really ubiquitous? You know, computer-assisted coding is basically, you know, everybody has it. And going from there to what now, you could argue is the next big wave of coding automation with autonomous coding.

Brinton Frisby: Yeah, I like how you say that. I think full maybe full circle. It's certainly stepping stone or a milestone, I think, for me to be part of this next generation of our solutions and our portfolio development. And also just as the industry now develops as well and adapts to change and to be part of it is really exciting for me.

Nina Rachetta: Yes, totally agree. So we're not going to talk too much about like defining what autonomous coding is or what the problems are in in the marketplace. I think that that has been established.

We all know you know automation is needed, especially for coding workflows. And you know the constraints with our current customers, they tell us time and time again how important this is and how they want it yesterday.

But what I really wanted to focus today is on talking about the importance of getting accurate final code sets out for billing. What are the implications in your opinion otherwise if just send codes out that may you know may not be fully accurate?

Brinton Frisby: Well, we would never do that. I think that would be contrary to our company culture, to the mission and goals and objectives of our of our company ever since I've been here and been a part of it.

First is 3M, health information systems, and now is Solventum. One of the, I would say, cornerstones of our culture is integrity in in the church in in the sense of complete and compliant solutions and so everything I've ever been a part of has definitely lived up to that and that is certainly the objective here with these next these next solutions that we're developing uh this as we go through this technology wave.

Nina Rachetta: Yeah, absolutely. So going back to that, you know, importance of get the accurate final code sets, I guess if you could talk a little bit about how so hard or easy or, you know, what does it take to come up with this, something that's accurate, reliable, that can be sent truly directly to the billing system without any human intervention.

Brinton Frisby: I mean, it does take a lot. You're right. We are heavily invested in our technology, both in terms of the innovation of the technology, but also the compliance and regulation compliance that goes along with it. And so what does it take? That's a great question. I think it takes a few things.

Number one, it does take innovation and it takes an innovative mindset, which thankfully we have a vision of where we want this to go. That started a few years ago.

We had just recently acquired the M*Modal business and we were thinking about what does the next generation of products look like both from a coding perspective but also if you think about two businesses coming together.

Merging those products together, creating a single product portfolio from two what were what were two separate businesses. And we really did from that point forward at adopt an innovation mindset. And so it takes a lot of data science. It takes a lot of testing. It takes access to data to train those models and validate the results of those models. But that's just one piece of that equation. I think the second critical piece to that equation is access to clinical subject matter experts.

And so having access to our coding analyst teams, having product owners who understand the industry, understand the coding regulations, understanding the EMRs and the documentation requirements and the documentation limitations in some cases is another critical component. And really the magic happens bringing those two teams together, the data science and the innovation, along with that clinical expertise and having them work together cohesively to build the best possible solution, I think, is what we're doing now.

Nina Rachetta: Yes, I think that resonates a lot with especially what we have been doing so far with computer-assisted coding and providing you know the correct auto-suggestion codes for our clients and you know into what is the next step with autonomous coding.

With that said, can you define or can you explain to our audience what it really is the difference between autonomous coding and computer-assisted coding?

Brinton Frisby: Yeah, it's a good question and it's something that I think is important to distinguish. Because computer-assisted coding has been very valuable, I would say, probably the last... 12 or 14 years, it certainly had an important place in our industry. And it's served a very valuable purpose. It helps in the coding process to present the entire encounter to a medical coder with all of the supporting documentation and data, discrete data elements, and along with that documentation in order for them to code as quickly and efficiently as possible and as completely as possible.

Autonomous coding builds on that foundation. And so access to data is critical. And the computer-assisted coding tool set does provide some level of access to data for training new models. But really autonomous takes the concept of medical coding to the next level. And what it does and what AI in general does is it mimics human behavior. And so the idea here is to use the computers, use the advancements in technology in terms of machine learning, in terms of compute power, data storage, things that are available to us now, through partnership with public cloud vendors and build a solution that can mimic the role of the human coder for those encounters that are completely documented.

And it can produce the correct codes with a proper level of confidence assessed with those codes, such of that we have a sense of assurance that they are ready to go to the next stage of the billing process without a human touch or human review.

Nina Rachetta: So I've heard you in past discussions, you're referencing and not just the technology, but what you know what other things outside of large language models, deep learning, layered in all the different components of AI, and I think you touched a little bit just now on and content and the content expertise, certainly, m to bring everything together, to make sense for the technology to make sense in the in the healthcare care environment where we are.

What else would you say that goes on top of all those two components that make it so this is cohesively a solution that not only provides correct codes, but they're going to likely not get denied when they get we would then get into the billing?

Brinton Frisby: Yeah. So in my mind, the technology has four critical components. And you touched on two of them. One is when is the data science and the models that generate accurate codes or produce accurate codes from the available documentation. Second is the clinical expertise that is required to train those models to behave in a way that is expected in health care setting.

On top of those two kind of foundational components, you have critical workflows. AI in and of itself is valuable, but it usually needs a workflow to deliver its value. And so building on top of some of the components and then and within our portfolio today, having audit workflows and coding workflows and products that allow for integration with the AI is very valuable.

And also the EHR integration. I can't overstate how important it is that we we're able to integrate with the leading EHRs. We're able to get the data out of them. But also, for those autonomous encounters, we're able to send transaction back to the EHR, completing the coding process and preparing it for the next stage of the billing process.

And so that's part of the workflow. So that's the third, I would say, critical component is the workflow.

The fourth critical component to a successful technology platform, such as what we're talking about, is the security aspect of it. Because at the level that we're processing data and the controls that are that are in place and the access to very sensitive information, the security becomes the next somewhat limiting factor.

Or you can look at it as an enabling factor if the security controls are in place and managed responsibly. And so we go through third-party audits in our environment, in our cloud environment, to make sure that we're compliant with all the latest security standards, encryption, transmission, and all the other aspects of that of that storage and maintenance platform.

And so I think those are, for me, the four critical areas. And we have significant investments, resources, teams working on all four of those.

Nina Rachetta: So I may have missed this, but doesn't hurt to say it again. But the coding guidelines and regulatory compliance are also super important. Can you briefly just circle back on that and kind of say how are we implementing those within the technology?

Brinton Frisby: Great question, Nina. So the answer is that's part of that clinical expertise that that we have kind of as part of our DNA is like as a company, as part of our culture. We have over 400 trained medical coders on staff that perform a number of different roles.

But we are constantly monitoring regulatory changes, making sure that all of our products are compliant. Some of the other things that we do is we have some of those coding analysts and other subject matter experts working alongside development teams, making sure that the solutions that they build or that they have are compliant, and they also have proper inputs to information to help them to design and build the most complete and compliant solution.

And then we also have teams that actually code and review output of our engine. And so there's a percentage of encounters that the engine deems as confident. And we will have our our team in the background coding and reviewing those in an audit type of a role to make sure they agree and that they have eyes on what the engine's producing and that they're comfortable with those results.

Nina Rachetta: So is it fair to say that automation without compliance or accuracy is automation for automation's sake? I mean, end-to-end automation is more than that, right?

What is your take on the subject?

Brinton Frisby: Yeah, I think that's a good way to characterize it. I think automation is only valuable if it is accurate and compliant, like we've talked about so far. And so if that's not achieved, then it can just create more work on the back end. And there could be a very real result of just having to shift resources, maybe from the coding department to the billing

department or denials processing or denials management or something like that that doesn't really provide the value that at least that we expect to give to our customers.

One of the things that we've done with our automation is we try to put the control in the hands of theuser, the customers. And so we have a validation service that lives in the cloud, and it serves a number of different roles. But it allows customers to create custom rules, for our custom validation rules to control the flow of the automation.

For an example that is kind of an easy one is one customer wanted early on for all telehealth visits to be manually reviewed. And so they were able to very simply themselves write a rule that said telehealth encounters will go to a manual coding work list rather than, even if it was qualified for automation, rather than going through the automation process. pipeline. So we put the control back to the customer's hands.

But another function of that validation service, and I think really the critical one here is we are still processing the rich content we have within our coding platform. All of those valuable edits that are processed in the coding process will still be processed within the autonomous coding process. Now, I know that's kind of a mouthful, but autonomous will still use those and run the coding edits. And we also allow custom edits those will transfer over and will also process within that pipeline.

Nina Rachetta: Okay, yeah, I think that really puts the little button and the ribbon there, I think, for our listeners to really understand the importance of coding automation, the huge responsibility that that is, and that we clearly don't take it lightly. So thank you so much for sharing your perspective and your subject matter expertise as we continue to advance AI technology to further coding automation.

And thank you to our listeners. Until next time.

Brinton Frisby: Thanks, Nina.