

Podcast episode transcript: MeChelle Walker and Brytani Griner

MeChelle Walker: Welcome to the Inside Angle podcast from Solventum, formerly 3M Healthcare. My name is MeChelle Walker. I'm a global product owner for coding automation at Solventum, and I'll be your host today.

Today, I have the pleasure of speaking with Brytani Griner, vice president of coding services at Ensemble Health Partners. Brytani has extensive experience directing all aspects of coding, HIM, ranging from managing the organization's ENFP to preparing, scanning, and indexing files to release of information to implementing process improvements.

Brytani has the proven ability to standardize operations, reduce inefficiencies, and increase interdepartmental communication while ensuring compliance with HIPAA, PHI, and other privacy laws.

Brytani takes pride in building, training, and leading high-performing teams capable of consistently meeting SLA requirements and completing fast-paced HIM tasks in an accurate, timely manner.

Welcome to the podcast.

Brytani Griner: Thank you. I'm excited to be here. Thank you for having me.

MeChelle Walker: So, Brytani, I know as we think about how many people in the industry are talking about AI we know that that's going to require change within an organization. And I'd love for you to share with us a little bit about why your organization knew or came to the decision that you needed AI in your organization to accelerate your coding workflows.

Can you tell us a little bit about why you believe other healthcare care organizations need it?

Brytani Griner: Yeah, I mean, just healthcare care organizations just in general are facing increasing documentation complexity, regulatory demands, etc. We could have a whole conversation on payer challenges and payer behavior. And then staffing challenges, as I kind of mentioned early on in our conversation, is a big one as well. So AI tools are really going to help streamline coding workflows by automating those just routine tasks.

So it's going to improve our accuracy. It's going to help us with reducing denials. And it's going to allow our coders to focus on those complex cases and strategic oversight of the coding workflow process. So it's going to enhance our operational efficiency and patient quality outcomes, which is another huge buzzword in the industry right now.

It's not about speed and getting the account out the door and getting a claim. Those are all very important. And then getting paid on the claim, those are all very important aspects of your revenue cycle. But there's a lot of patient quality aspects that health organizations are digging into now as well. It affects their star rating. So if you think about it, you know, and I'm big on analogies, if you think about it's just giving your team that jet pack instead of some roller skates, right? Speed, accuracy, precision. It's going to enhance us and allow us to be more efficient.

MeChelle Walker: Yeah, absolutely. So can you tell us a little bit about what the Ensemble process was pre-automation or pre-autonomous coding? What does your team do today to ensure accurate codes and can you describe any a hurdles or obstacles that your team had as they were riding on those roller skates before the jetpack?

Brytani Griner: So prior to autonomous coding, in order to keep up with compliance and coding accuracy as, you know, pre-autonomous and getting that accurate, clean claim out the door. So we're relying on a very robust process that includes rigorous audits, you know on both sides, inpatient outpatient, second level reviews, coder led validation on accounts.

You know, all of these workflows are effective, but they're very labor intensive, right? It's staffing, it goes back to staffing challenges. So it's a manual process as well. So our teams are working diligently to not only ensure that there's accuracy, but I do strongly feel that the transition to AI is going to help it alleviate some of these administrative tasks that we have every day in our workflows. And it's going to improve consistency. It's going to allow our coders to focus on more of those complex accounts and denial reduction.

When you think about being able to focus and spend more time on the complex accounts, and it's not just speed, speed, speed, we can look at the accounts, making sure that they're being coded appropriately, reducing the denial reduction, the first-pass denials on the front end of the coding side before the claim comes back as a as a denial.

When you sit back, I think you really are impacting the entire revenue cycle doing so.

MeChelle Walker: Well, I think it's great that you all are doing such a good job now ensuring that you have compliant and correct codes and happy to work with you on the automation side for the AI models to also supply correct and compliant codes but with automation.

That's, to your point, it's such a jet pack, right, to get things done so much more expeditiously.

I'd love for you to talk a little bit about Ensemble's plan to implement your customers. I know that you have a very strategic way that you're thinking about this. Ensemble, I know you have such a broad expanse of customers, type of customers, location of those customers. Many of them use different MACs or Medicare payers. So can you share with us a little bit about what your strategic plan is for that implementation?

Brytani Griner: Yeah, so if I could give you just one word to explain it all, I'd say carefully. So carefully, knowing that we want to do it right the first time. So part of that, when I mean carefully, we're piloting. We're validating. So it's part of our strategic plan.

If you have an organization with 30 hospitals, my recommendation is we don't go live with 30 hospitals. Let's pilot it. Let's select a few. Let's get it right the first time. So we're piloting. We're validating.

So what I mean by that is accounts that are going through autonomous coding and that they're qualifying for autonomous coding we're validating that, hey, did autonomous coding code it correctly and compliantly? So we're coding it and we're making sure that the codes that a coder would have applied to the account are matching what autonomous coding applied to the account.

So, and then, you know, all that sums up to just overall compliance. So we're taking a phased approach at this. We're starting on the outpatient side, on the facility outpatient side, and the professional coding side.

And then our strategy includes you you know aligning those technical specifications. So it's a true partnership, making sure that the IT specs are lining up, that accounts and charges are flowing shoot through exactly as they would if there was a manual coder touching those accounts.

I think the biggest part of that and as part of our strategic plan is constantly refining the models. So based on, I'll call a real world feedback. What are the coders seeing? What are the leaders seeing? What's client IT seeing? What I love about being able to go through and walk this path is we're not waiting a week in between calls to say, okay, well, these five accounts, they qualified, but, you know, a coder would have coded them this way.

We're meeting daily, multiple times a day, to constantly just refine this workflow in the model so that we can, you know, get it right the first time.

MeChelle Walker: That's great. And Brytani, I know myself and other team members work with Ensemble regularly. We don't require coders to report back to us what the changes and differences are. As you know, we use statistics and reporting to drive those decisions. And I know your team has been really good about embracing that data, those data points, and evaluating that.

I know it's a hard balance between moving fast and doing it methodically. Can you share with us any questions, tips or tricks that you guys have for balancing that let's go fast and let's go methodically and correctly how do you balance those two things?

Brytani Griner: Yeah, and I think it's using the statistics, that data. It all is hearing, you know, creating those chats and, you know, what are we seeing on some of the accounts? It's the back and forth feedback. So, the data is definitely huge in this process.

And then, you know, I would tie this to a little bit of the human piece too and bringing some change management into it and really explaining what autonomous coding is doing for our future and for the roles of our coders. And letting them know that this is going to allow us to focus on those complex accounts. I would also tie back to just, you know, as of your organization, selecting a few of those SMEs.

So get some of those super users, get some of those coders that really are into technology that are ready for that growth or the next step and have them help provide some of the feedback and the insights that they're seeing from their end as the accounts go through autonomous coding.

MeChelle Walker: Those are great points, Brytani. And I know that, as you mentioned, picking certain subject matter experts and working with them, as you can imagine, we're hearing a lot in the industry about coders who are concerned or are worried about their job, job displacement, all of the things that comes along with technology and that concern.

I'd love to hear a little more, if we could dig in a little more about what you're doing to help coders prepare for the technology. and how their mindset needs to shift from being an author of the codes or even editing codes to helping to manage that autonomous aspect.

Can you share a little bit?

Brytani Griner: Yeah, this one is a really important one to me. Like I just said, at the end of the day, technology is technology, but we have a have humans. So there's a human side to all of this.

And what I mean by the human side is there are there are feelings. but As you are in the industry, and you know autonomous coding and AI just in general you've heard about it for probably the last three to four years, right? So what I would say is, and in part of preparing is being transparent and talking about it early.

So knowing that this is a technology and this is AI that is coming, it's what i don't want to see us do or organizations do is wait and then it's knocking on your door and you're not prepared. You haven't talked to your team. You haven't been transparent with them. So what was really important to me was being transparent with the team Get in front of them and educate yourself also. I like to tell my leaders, know what autonomous coding is so that you can intelligently talk about it to your team. So know the difference between autonomous coding and cat coding and confident codes and auto selection. So use your ChatGPT tools out there in the industry that can easily help explain that if you're like, I don't know what that means or I don't know the difference between all of these different tools.

It's a simple Google search that will explain it in very detail and simple terms to make it make sense is what I always like to say. So it's, it's getting ahead of it, talking to your teams, being transparent, and then you have to invest in your teams.

This is a big one. To your point, MeChelle, about it being scary and change is hard.

A lot of coders in the industry are type A personalities, myself included. So you want change? I'm like, wait, hang on. This is scary. So knowing that there is that human feelings piece to it, want to get ahead of it.

So invest in the training. So think about how you can upskill your team. Think about change management. Think about what that means for the team and ensure your coders are ready for that transition. So specifically what we're doing at Ensemble is we're creating a professional development program.

And what this is is where we have taken roles within team within our organization roles that coders could fit into, right? So that we could train them, we could get them certified, we could up upscale them, look at what is the training going to look like? What is the certification, if it's required, what does that look like? What is the timeline to train someone on a specific role? So we took a look, we sat down, and we listed out all of the roles that that we could do.

So it's billing integrity specialists, denials and appeals, auditors specifically for inpatient and outpatient, or train our outpatient coders to be inpatient coders. So there are a lot of opportunities and professional growth opportunities.

And then we then the next step that we're going to take as part of this professional development program is where are they interested? Find out what excites your team, what new roles excites your team. and I think you know one of the roles you mentioned, MeChelle, a few minutes ago

was editing the codes, making sure that any of the exceptions. So as part of autonomous coding, there will be exceptions.

There will be accounts that fall out that don't meet the full autonomous coding, so we'll need coders to work those accounts as well. If it's not it's missing the documentation or it needs a modifier assigned, you know, all the list goes on for potential edits, but we'll need a role specifically for that as well.

MeChelle Walker: That's great. And I know, Brytani, one of your passions is about that change, that evolving change and working where you're with your team. And I think that's great because, as you mentioned, the more people understand technology, the more they will embrace that technology.

It's when they don't know or don't understand that it becomes harder to integrate and accept that change. So, Ensemble is doing a very nice job. I know you all are very active with us in and that engagement and that ongoing innovation. So it's a partnership, I think, that will continue to develop and grow, and we certainly appreciate that.

You mentioned this quite a bit, Brytani, and about the roles changing a bit for coders. and And I love that you all call it up skill, expanding that that knowledge and skill set, helping people get better and do more and go deeper in areas where you need them to. I think that's fantastic.

So you've talked a little bit about how that's going to shift the role of the coders. One thing I'd like to also add is how do you envision getting the coders to trust the automation?

We've touched on this a little bit. We've talked about statistics and reporting and things, but I'd really like to focus on that because as we think about users embracing technology, what's Ensemble doing to help the the coders build trust in that automation?

Brytani Griner: Yeah, it's the proof's in the data. So I think, looking at the data and the statistics and the feedback, I think the biggest part of trusting something new that is change is prove it to me.

Prove it to me through you're from, through statistics and data that the account, blue you know, went through autonomous coding correctly and that it ended At the end goal of this, so a claim went out the door and a claim and a payer paid on the claim. So I think as we continue to build out autonomous coding and and increase our specialties, we'll have more data to prove and to show that.

But at the end of the day, that's going to be the biggest piece is how do we prove through data compliance that the accounts are, you know, 95% or better. You want to see 98, 99% compliance. You know, proving that they're compliant, that clean claims are going out the door. And I feel wholeheartedly that all of that can be done through showing our teams the data.

MeChelle Walker: Very interesting and thanks for sharing that. I know one of the things we see and and this will be the last point I think that we can go through but we also tend to see and I'd love to hear how you address this at Ensemble but we tend to see sometimes coders adding codes to an encounter or visit that weren't necessarily required to make that encounter compliant or to get it paid for services or to validate medical necessity. I know that you all focus

a little bit on that because you have such a big team and so many customers that you work with. How do you address that?

Brytani Griner: Yeah, I think that one, I'll tie that one back to like just coding guidelines. And that's a big one.

So, even if once the account goes through autonomous coding, it's still going to hit our auditing tool. So it's going to hit our auditing tool. And if it falls out or it has a probability of error score assigned to it, that it's going to cause an auditor to look at it.

And then, so an auditor is going to look at it and then say, hey, you know what, a coder added this account. They shouldn't have they shouldn't have had to add this. The account would have been fine and compliant, just, you know, the way it was.

Then they're going to provide that fat feedback real time back to the coders. So, you know, to answer that, it's the tips and tricks around that or is auditing quickly, looking at, you know, what mistakes were made or what opportunities did the account have on it, getting the real time feedback back to the coder that touched the account or that added the codes so that they learn from those opportunities. So it's not coming back a month later, 60 days later in some audit. They're getting it real time. I coded that account yesterday. This is how I should have coded it. Or that based on the coding clinic or the coding guideline, this is this would have made it more appropriate code set.

MeChelle Walker: Great, thanks Brytani. Thank you so much for spending time with us today.

Brytani Griner: Thank you again for having me. I truly really enjoyed it.