

5 Tips for Successful AI Adoption in Front-End Revenue Cycle Operations

Lessons Learned from Scaling Automation in Prior Authorization and Patient Access at Carle Health

AI-driven automation is becoming a major focus across healthcare operations, especially in front-end workflows like prior authorization, scheduling, and patient access. But while many organizations are eager to automate, technology alone does not solve the operational inefficiencies in these areas.

For Carle Health, a health system that completes more than 1 million authorizations a year, the journey toward AI-driven prior authorization automation revealed a critical lesson: successful automation depends just as much on operational readiness, standardization, and workforce adoption as it does on the technology itself.

After transitioning from highly manual workflows to a more scalable and intelligent automation model, Carle Health identified several key lessons that helped improve consistency, reduce variability, and support long-term operational transformation.

Here are five tips healthcare organizations should consider before scaling AI in front-end operations.



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Standardize Before You Automate

One of the organization's earliest discoveries was that volume itself was not the biggest challenge, but the variation across their workflows.

Referral statuses were inconsistent. Some order sets lacked CPT codes entirely. Staff members often interpreted authorization requirements differently depending on the payer, procedure, or service line. Different teams followed different workflows.

Without consistency, automation is difficult to scale effectively.

Before introducing AI into the workflow, Carle Health focused on:

- ▶ Standardizing intake forms
- ▶ Aligning documentation requirements
- ▶ Creating consistent decision points
- ▶ Establishing predictable workflows across teams

By reducing these variations, Carle Health was able to sustain and scale operations with automation.

Develop a Selective Automation Approach

Rather than attempting to automate every authorization scenario immediately, Carle Health took an incremental automation approach. Their initial focus included:

- ▶ High-volume payers
- ▶ Rule-based processes
- ▶ Largest denials by payer
- ▶ Accounts with low clinical complexity
- ▶ Repeatable workflows

This approach allowed the AI to drive consistency while reducing repetitive manual work for staff members who were previously logging into payer portals and manually reviewing accounts that often did not require authorization at all.

More complex cases—such as inpatient behavioral health and bariatric surgery authorizations—remained under human oversight due to the number of milestones, clinical requirements, and judgment calls involved.

As a result, Carle Health was able to scale automation without compromising patient care or operational quality.



Build the Operational Foundation First

As Carle Health expanded their AI initiatives, they knew automation performance depended heavily on infrastructure readiness. Successful outcomes required:

- ▶ Data quality
- ▶ Reliable integrations
- ▶ Structured inputs
- ▶ Consistent workflows
- ▶ Strong testing processes

User acceptance testing (UAT) also became a major focus area. Larger sample sizes and broader workflow testing helped uncover edge cases and workflow gaps that might otherwise have disrupted automation performance after go-live.



Prioritize Workforce Adoption

One of the most important lessons from Carle Health's implementation was that long-term success depended heavily on workforce adoption.

Leadership initially believed the AI implementation would naturally solve operational challenges, but the organization quickly realized that staff members needed visibility into how the automation worked and confidence in the outcomes it produced. Without that trust, teams often reverted back to older manual workflows and workarounds.

To support adoption, Carle Health prioritized transparency, education, and collaboration throughout the rollout process. Weekly working sessions gave staff members the opportunity to review real-life cases, ask questions, and better understand how automation decisions were being made.

As automation performance became more predictable and reliable over time, adoption increased alongside it.





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Transform **Workforce Productivity**

AI adoption also required Carle Health to rethink how work was distributed across the team. Before automation, staff members could often meet productivity goals by completing simpler accounts quickly—particularly cases that did not require authorization.

As automation took over more repetitive and rule-based tasks, human staff shifted toward higher-value tasks such as exception handling, complex authorizations, and escalation management. Leadership needed to help teams understand their value was no longer tied solely to transaction volume, but rather to the complexity and quality of the work being completed.

The organization ultimately **reallocated six front-end FTEs into higher-value tasks** after implementing AI-driven preregistration automation.

THE BIGGER TAKEAWAY:

Successful Automation Requires Strong Workforce Adoption

For Carle Health, the most meaningful outcomes came not simply from implementing technology, but from combining AI-driven automation with a strong workforce adoption program. That included:

- ▶ Standardized workflows
- ▶ Strong data foundations
- ▶ Incremental adoption strategies
- ▶ Workforce engagement
- ▶ Continuous refinement
- ▶ Clear governance structures

As their automation matured, the organization achieved:

Less than a
0.5%
no-authorization denial rate

Authorization completion up to
30 DAYS
before scheduled service

Carle Health improved scalability across front-end operations, including automation expansion into preregistration workflows, helping reduce manual workload while allowing staff members to focus on more complex patient-facing activities.

Lasting success depends on the intentional integration of AI-powered automation into well-designed workflows, enabling people to focus their expertise where it delivers the greatest value.



Build the Foundation for Successful AI-Driven Automation

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