Overview

WellPoint brought the first IBM Watson Solution from pilot to production in under one year to help streamline healthcare insurance pre-approvals for patients and providers. This project aims for greater efficiency of the process to help promote objective review of requested procedures based on clinical and patient data. It is expected to produce actionable, confidence-weighted analysis based on relevant content, policies and guidelines

Solution Components

Software
• IBM® Watson® Utilization Management Advisor
Hardware
• Running on IBM® Power 7 systems

# WellPoint works to accelerate pre-approvals, targeting the 1 in 9 Americans they serve

First IBM Watson pilot goes live in healthcare aiming to improve outcomes for 33.5M members

WellPoint, Inc., headquartered in Indianapolis, IN, teamed up with IBM in September 2011to put IBM Watson to work. With medical information doubling every five years, healthcare is an ideal opportunity to apply Watson's groundbreaking capabilities in a way that could make a major contribution to the quality and efficiency of healthcare decisions.

Challenge

Thirty percent of the $2.3 trillion dollars spent on healthcare in the US annually is wasted due in part to overuse and inappropriate use of healthcare dollars. While there are many factors contributing to this statistic, one step toward reducing waste is through improving the Utilization Management (UM) process that governs the pre-approval of healthcare insurance coverage for many medical procedures based on evidence-based medicine and clinical practice guidelines. Improving response time, accuracy and consistency of the review process has been a goal of the entire industry. One of the key challenges to attaining this goal is the amount of clinical and patient data that must be analyzed to make a decision quickly. WellPoint was looking for ways to expedite healthcare decisions quickly and consistently. They picked UM as a starting point.

The goal was to provide faster processing of physician's treatment requests, save members time and improve efficiencies in the approval process. Years ago, UM heavily depended on a process highlighted by written authorization and manual, subjective assessment performed by health plan clinical staff. Long wait times for approval frustrated patients and providers – especially when time-sensitive treatments were requested. Subsequent refinements of this manual review and pre-approval process led to code based procedures and a rigid guideline-driven approval process. WellPoint recognized the inefficiencies of the process and took the opportunity to leapfrog historical barriers with a new approach.
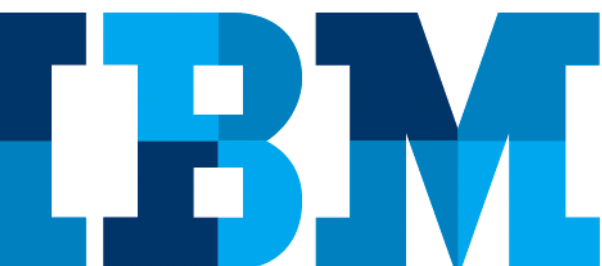
Solution

"The power of Watson to bring information and data together, make it relevant at the point of care where decisions are being made… brings all the available information and turns it into knowledge at the point where it can make a difference." – Lori Beer, WellPoint Executive Vice President

WellPoint trained Watson with 25,000 historical cases to help its nursing staff streamline pre-approvals based on intuitive, natural human language cases and evidence in an automated decision process. As part of their pilot, they used Watson for 1500 real life cases with very favorable results. Less than one year after beginning the pilot, WellPoint put Watson into the first ever live production environment at five provider offices with more on the way.

Benefits

- As an early step into Cognitive Systems, a new era of computing, Watson co-evolves with treatment guidelines, policies, and medical best practices
- Natural language processing leverages the unstructured data such as text-based treatment requests and dialogue which comprises 80% of the world's total data that would otherwise be underutilized or ignored
- Hypothesis generation and evaluation provides confidence-scored and references-backed evidence-based suggestions to help UM nurses make better and more efficient decisions about treatment authorization requests
- Computing learning enables system to improve iteratively as payers and providers use it

For more information

To learn more about IBM Watson, Watson for Healthcare, and Cognitive System, contact your IBM sales representative or visit IBMWatson.com

"What Watson can do is help us match up all the new discoveries and new clinical information and present that to our nurses in the context of an individual patient,"
- Dr. Harlan Levine, WellPoint Executive Vice President