

7 Challenges Revenue Cycle Leaders are Facing in 2026



Automation, AI,
& Analytics



Ongoing
Regulatory Change



Workforce Shortages
& Knowledge Drain



Operational Efficiency &
Tighter Cost Discipline



Denials Growth &
Payer Complexity



Poor Patient
Financial Experience



Vendor Accountability
& Partnership Scrutiny



Operational Efficiency & Tighter Cost Discipline

Challenges:

- Continued payer reimbursement pressure
- Hospitals operating with razor-thin or negative margins
- Increased scrutiny over vendor ROI and performance guarantees
- Leadership expecting RCM to fund operations, not just collect revenue

2026 Reality:

CFOs want:

- Fewer vendors
- Clearer accountability
- Measureable outcomes

Workforce Shortages & Knowledge Drain

Challenges:

- Persistent shortages in billing & follow up, denials & coding specialists, patient access & call center staff
- Loss of historical knowledge with staff attrition
- Heavy reliance on overtime, temp labor, and outsourcing



2026 Reality:

RCM leaders must invest in training and knowledge enablement – not just headcount.

Denials Growth & Payer Complexity

Challenges:

- Denials driven by preauthorization failures, medical necessity disputes, and increasing payer edits & AI-driven audits
- More retrospective reviews and post-payment takebacks
- Difficulty assigning single ownership across fragmented workflows



2026 Reality:

Denials are no longer a back-end issue. They start at scheduling and registration.

Poor Patient Financial Experience

Challenges:

- Patients behaving more like consumers as a result of higher self-pay balances and delayed partial payments
- Confusion around EOBs, estimates, and financial responsibility
- Call centers under pressure to resolve issues on first contact



2026 Reality:

**Poor patient experience =
lost revenue + brand
damage**

Ongoing Regulatory Change

Challenges:

- Ongoing changes tied to:
 - Price transparency enforcement
 - No Surprises Act compliance
 - State-level billing regulations
- Increased audit exposure with limited staff capacity
- Documentation expectations rising without operational support



2026 Reality:

Compliance work is expanding faster than internal teams can absorb.

Automation, AI & Analytics

Challenges:

- AI is no longer optional, but adoption is uneven
- Challenges include poor data quality, staff distrust of automation, and misaligned workflows
- Risk of buying technology without operational readiness



2026 Reality:

AI + process + people
Not technology alone

Vendor Accountability & Partnership Scrutiny

Challenges:

- Health systems are demanding clear ownership of outcomes, contingency-based models, and transparent performance reporting
- “Staff augmentation” is no longer enough

2026 Reality:

Vendors must act as true RCM extensions, not task executors



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