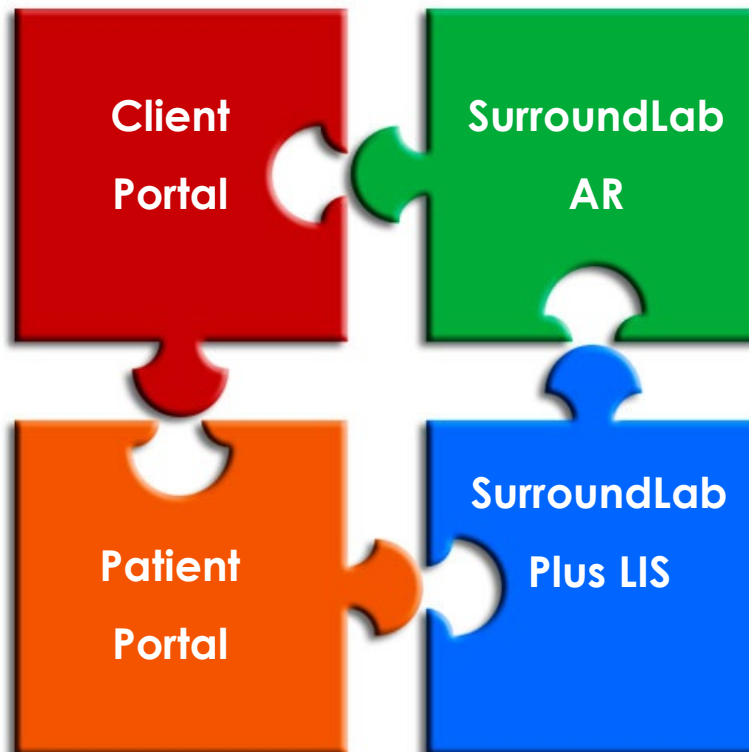


## The Benefits of an Integrated Software Solution

Author: Lisa M. Turgeon

Seacoast Laboratory Data Systems, Inc.



## Seacoast - Saving you time & money with integrated solutions

Over the past few years, the Laboratory industry has experienced a steady stream of market pressures. A series of unrelated events have combined to create an environment of diminishing returns for lab businesses. Chief among the trends include increasing payer denials, pricing reductions because of PAMA, an increase in patient co-pays and deductibles and a decrease in the available workforce. These events have left laboratories with no choice but to scrutinize their current business practices and devise ways to decrease operating expenses while maximizing revenue. Failure to do so may result in an unsustainable revenue stream, sale to another lab or simply business closures.

“Remember that  
time is money”

-Benjamin Franklin

-BENJAMIN FRANKLIN

Historically labs have taken a very magnanimous approach to any patient related costs. This includes items such as incorrect frequency and/or missing ABN (limited coverage failures), patient co-pay and deductibles, and outright insurance denials for uncovered tests. Labs have chosen to ‘take the high road’, run the tests because the doctor ordered it and kick the can down the road to AR. Each of these taken alone may not be a huge financial burden to a lab. A missed ABN here or there, occasional frequency failure, non-payment from a patient, write it off and move on. Those days are long gone; laboratories must take steps to bridge the financial gap that has been created by these new challenges.

Prudence dictates a multi-pronged approach to tackling these issues. While increasing sales is a quick answer to a decrease in collections, this should not be the only effort put forth. Increasing sales takes time, assumes there are untapped markets to be harvested and the sales to implementation cycle can be protracted. Labs can look to bring increased automation and enhanced software solutions to their operations as a means to reduce FTE effort and increase collections in areas that have historically been ill managed, namely patient bills. “Remember time is money” is an apt quotation from Benjamin Franklin. By improving efficiency and reducing FTE time to perform a variety of tasks, the lab can realize a tangible savings in labor costs.

The Seacoast Suite of integrated software solutions for the clinical lab provide a plethora of benefits and efficiencies to the typical lab workflow. This truly integrated system offers the user many symbiotic relationships across each platform, which result in a decreased workload and increase in data transparency. Consider a laboratory solution that leverages master files from 1 central application across multiple related platforms. This configuration allows the laboratory to leverage master files from 1 application to another, and allows for real time data updates across the system. A configuration such as this has tangible benefits to the lab workflow.

The first of these benefits is reduced file maintenance tasks. Master files defined in 1 application ([SurroundLab™ AR](#)) are leveraged and used by other applications within the software suite. This translates to fewer FTE hours required for maintenance and updates. One central set of master files means consistent application of rules (such as Limited Coverage), as well as real time updates across all applications once the main system is configured. The sharing of files also allows for novel cross platform functionality. For example, the following actions can be executed in the LIS ([SurroundLab Plus](#)) during the Order Entry process, by utilizing the existing files from the AR system:

- Real time Limited Coverage Checking
- Real Time Frequency Checking
- Real Time Prior-Authorization Alerts
- Real Time Insurance Eligibility Checking
- Real Time 'Bad Debt' Alerts

These checks rely not only on shared master files, but also the cross-system ability to use and apply a master Patient Identification (PID) for each unique patient. This master PID is applied to a patient, regardless of ordering client, and is utilized for unique patient identification purposes across the spectrum of applications. These alerts allow you to stay ahead of ABN and frequency issues, collect on bad debt while the patient is present, pause an order that requires prior authorization so proper authorization can be obtained and verify eligibility before the samples are collected. All these up-front activities allow you to prevent an order that will lead to non-payment before it occurs.

Integrated systems also allow for seamless transfer of tasks from the inside of the lab (i.e. lab staff FTE) out to your clients. The processing of Missing Information is one important application. With an integrated and automated system ([Client Portal](#)), the method of collecting Missing Information from clients takes on a new and improved workflow. Information entered by the Client via the web-based application is immediately reflected in the AR system. When all edits are cleared by the client, the Invoice is automatically submitted to the insurance for payment. In this workflow, the lab staff is relieved of the tasks typically associated with processing Missing Information requests, saving time, and improving efficiency.

In addition to streamlining the Missing Information process, integrated software applications enhance your clients' online experience with invoice management options. With options to review open invoices as well as closed, your clients' stay informed of the status of their ongoing lab charges with ease. Open invoice edit allows your clients to request the transfer of 3<sup>rd</sup> party or patient charges before the billing cycle closes. These requests are easily reviewed and approved by the lab staff, thus reducing the amount of invoice edits that occur after closing. Lastly, payments made by credit card and e-check are posted immediately within the SurroundLab AR system. This seamless flow of data from the client facing website to the AR application again reduces the staff burden related to managing client invoices and posting payments.

These same online payment concepts are also applied for patient payments. With [Easy Pay](#), your patients are notified via email of a new invoice. After accessing the online application with their secure login credentials, patients have several options available to them, including:

- View current and past invoices with open balances
- Print current and past invoices for their records
- Make a credit card payment
- Manage payments for their lab payment plan
- Update their insurance information and demographic information

As with the Client Portal, payments made via the web are immediately reflected in the AR system, and can be automatically posted to the invoice. Again these activities occur without staff intervention or handling, reducing the FTE effort needed to manage patient payments.

Data integration concepts can also be applied to the area of imaging systems ([SLScan](#)), specifically scanning requisitions. Reconciliation between the incoming LIS HL7 data and scanned requisitions means you will never miss a patient encounter again. Reports include both scanned images without HL7 data and vice versa, providing a complete cross check of your lab data. In addition, AR Order Entry work queues are created from the scanned requisitions, making data entry a breeze.

With the tightly integrated Seacoast Suite of Products for the Clinical Laboratory, you can leverage master files across platforms, reduce FTE labor and increase up front patient engagement. These benefits, along with a single vendor contact for support, provide your lab with many opportunities to gain efficiency, introduce automation into the workflow and decrease FTE time needed for many daily tasks. All of these add up to saving you time, which as we know, is money!

## About Us

Since 1986 Seacoast Laboratory Data Systems has been providing quality customizable software solutions and services to commercial and hospital outreach laboratories nationwide. Seacoast offers the industry leading SurroundLab™ suite of high throughput clinical and financial products, custom application development, and application enhancement. By focusing our efforts entirely on commercial and outreach laboratories, we understand the unique problems and demands faced by our clients and provide the products and services critical to meeting these challenges head-on. Please visit us at <http://www.sldsi.com>