

Back to Basics:
5 Ways to Improve
Information Flow
and the Patient
Experience



5 Ways to Improve Information Flow and the Patient Experience

The way you capture, transform and manage data can have a large impact on patient experience. So, how can you improve the way you manage information — whether structured or unstructured — in order to leave a positive, lasting impression on your patients?

Consider the patient who arrives promptly for his initial visit in the hospital's cardiology department. He is understandably a little anxious. As he goes through his appointment, he must go to three separate departments to complete tests and at each stop he must complete additional, seemingly repetitive paperwork. During a follow-up visit several weeks later, a clinician is unable to locate lab results in the electronic medical record and, as a result, reorders the same test that was completed during the initial encounter.

Not surprisingly, the lack of information flow during this patient's visit has major implications on his overall patient experience — regardless of the actual care outcome. Frustrated with the duplicated paperwork and higher out-of-pocket costs because of the unnecessary test, the patient starts questioning the quality of care he received. The downstream consequences grow as he communicates his irritation and concern with family and friends, who share the situation with others in the community. The word-of-mouth grapevine produces negative perceptions of the hospital — potentially causing patients to seek other providers and facilities.

Simultaneously, when the patient receives a hospital survey requesting feedback about his care, he is quick to give the organization low scores for patient satisfaction as he recalls the lack of communication among his care team. Finally, the domino effect culminates when the patient's insurance company includes survey scores in its provider reimbursement calculations. As a result of the low marks, the hospital's reimbursement — and revenue — is reduced.

79% of patients feel more connected to healthcare providers who don't spend a lot of time on paperwork during visits.¹



This hypothetical scenario clearly demonstrates why patient experience is a top priority among healthcare providers who are increasingly aware of not only its clinical and business implications, but also its growing importance as a major contributor to a consumer's healthcare decisions.² Yet improving the patient experience can seem overwhelming because doing so involves multiple touch points across the organization, from pre-registration to discharge and billing.

So, how exactly do you approach the somewhat daunting task of improving patient experience throughout your organization? It can help to start small by pinpointing gaps within your information flow where data seems to be getting lost or mistranslated. Once you complete that step, it will be easier to see the full picture of where there might be room for improvements within your hospital. In fact, you might be surprised to find some rather simple fixes that can make a lasting impact on patient experience.

¹ https://www.ricoh-usa.com/news/news_release.aspx?prid=1554&alnv=pr

² <http://www.theberylinsitute.org/news/225739/The-Beryl-Institute-Announces-Initial-Findings-Showing-Patient-Experience-Remains-a-Top-Priority.htm>

Great Patient Experience No Longer Optional

As consumers take on more responsibility for their care — from selecting insurance plans and facilities to taking a larger role in the payment process — their expectations also are increasing. As in other industries, today's consumers demand that healthcare providers earn brand loyalty and repeat business by paying attention to customer service. Some recent study findings that support this notion include:

- Personal experience is the top reason for selecting a physician or hospital.³
- Customer service — translated to patient experience — is 2.5 times more important in healthcare than in other industries.⁴
- Consumers are more willing to share a positive retail or banking experience than a positive healthcare encounter.³
- Patients are less forgiving of a negative experience in healthcare than one in other industries.⁴

The importance of the patient experience is further strengthened by the recent unveiling of a five-star rating system by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS). It uses patient experience HCAHPS scores as a precursor to the 2016 rollout of an overall star rating system for hospital quality.⁵ Thus, the increasing degree of patient involvement in decision making is driving hospital revenue more than ever.

Medical identity theft has increased **22%** since 2014.⁶



Three-quarters of hospitals reported that they electronically exchanged health information with outside ambulatory providers or hospitals.⁹



Overall, few healthcare organizations question the value of the patient experience. The challenge, however, lies in its nebulous and pervasive nature. Creating a good patient experience typically requires attention during every interaction — from the initial contact for an appointment to wait times, from the availability of data to billing statements.

That is why patient experience can be improved with a multi-pronged approach that includes both data capture — through electronic and paper-based processes — and data sharing to make all aspects of the patient visit appear seamless.

³ <http://patientexperience.com/pwcstudy1/>

⁴ <http://patientexperience.com/pwcstudy1/>

⁵ <http://www.pwc.com/us/en/press-releases/2012/moment-of-truth-for-healthcare.jhtml>

⁶ <http://www.pwc.com/us/en/press-releases/2012/moment-of-truth-for-healthcare.jhtml>

⁷ http://www.hhnmag.com/display/HHN-news-article.dhtml?dcrPath=/templatedata/HF_Common/NewsArticle/data/HHN/Daily/2015/April/CMS-Star-ratings-blog-Barr&utm_source=daily&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=HHN&eid=254491942&bid=1052170

⁸ <http://www.healthcareitnews.com/news/medical-identity-theft-hits-all-time-high?single-page=true>

⁹ <http://www.healthit.gov/buzz-blog/health-information-exchange-2/health-information-exchange-among-hospitals-grew-significantly-in-2014/>

Five Key Areas to Revisit

Technology is helping evolve the role of the patient, with more emphasis on secure access, user interfaces, customer service and quality control. On the provider side, the effective use of technology should start with the seamless and comprehensive capture of both structured and unstructured data for efficient document management across business operations, clinical care departments, and the broader care continuum community.

This leads to greater information mobility: the ability to access the information you need anytime, anywhere — and on any device. Having information available when and where you need it — whether paper or digital — can lead to better communication between staff and with patients, which can contribute to better care quality, patient safety, staff efficiency, organizational reputation, patient referrals and revenue. To help accomplish this level of information mobility throughout your organization, start by going “back to the basics” in these five key areas:

1. Paper Capture

A patient fills out the same information on multiple forms during a visit, negatively impacting patient experience — even before actual care begins.

An organization can proactively change this situation by knowing, as paper-based data comes in, the exact points where it needs to be accessible and how to efficiently capture, transform and manage it. This requires careful review of how unstructured data capture affects workflows and patient care, whether positive or negative.

Keep in mind that effectively managing paper-based data goes far beyond simply adding content to the EHR; it impacts care quality and safety as measures of the encounter, while also improving staff efficiency and contributing to a positive patient experience.

2. Workflows

Care can be deferred because a piece of data has not been entered into the EHR — a delay that puts the patient’s safety at risk and creates a negative experience.

Hospitals can help avoid this type of situation by understanding workflows that lead to connected care and informed business decisions.

When revisiting basic information capture and workflows, it is essential to consider how:

- delays impact patient care, business operations and the overall experience.
- information is captured so that the data needed at each point in the patient experience – registration, admission, care, discharge, referral, billing and follow up visits — is readily available.
- simultaneous data is captured, managed, tracked, and verified.
- data supports accurate and efficient communication so decisions are made quickly to deliver appropriate care.
- a lack of information can lead to redundant, unnecessary procedures that pose financial, clinical and patient safety burdens.

In many cases, workflows can be improved to make information more mobile and accessible across the care continuum. For example, notifications to healthcare providers alerting them about updates to a patient’s records in real-time can help improve access to information when and where it’s needed.

Five Key Areas to Revisit

3. Technology Infrastructure

A patient complains to her nurse that the same information has been gathered multiple times during her visit, impacting not only the patient experience but also staff satisfaction.

No two organizations or patients are the same. By assessing the needs of the specific organization and the patient first, it is easier to determine and prioritize which technology is needed to support care and the patient experience. Lack of an appropriate infrastructure often creates increases in costs and implementation time. Organizations can help avoid such situations by making sure their infrastructure is connected and integrated before building on it.

It can also be helpful to view the EHR simply as a data repository; look to other solutions for the functionalities needed to capture, transform and manage data, as well as provide required reports and analytics. When evaluating these solutions, consider how the technology handles additional data from outside sources. Think through, for example, how a solution would be able to merge more patient data into a single system as future consolidations and accountable care initiatives evolve.

Ask yourself, “What are my current clinical system(s) missing?” Once you identify these barriers, you can make a wish list of what items are needed to help you better understand how to improve patient care and safety. For example, the pharmacy and nursing floors could urgently use a secured instant message system to clarify physicians’ orders; however, the EHR doesn’t have that function. Because of this, the nurses and pharmacists waste countless hours on the phone calling instead of having more time involved in patient care. To start proactively identifying a solution, investigate “secured instant messaging pharmacy information systems” on the internet. You can then continue down your wish list and even enlist the CIO’s help to determine compatibility with current information systems. In addition, the CIO can increase communication to staff and reduce duplication of efforts.



“Effectively managing paper-based data goes far beyond simply adding content to the EHR; it impacts care quality and safety as measures of the encounter, while also improving staff efficiency and contributing to a positive patient experience.”

Lastly, it’s also important that interoperability standards are met and systems talk to each other. For instance, start by ensuring that the required HL7 data elements are captured and interoperable — starting with a patient’s first visit.

In the end, the technology infrastructure assessment comes down to three key questions:

- Is the technology right for this specific organization?
- Does it fit the needs of the environment and people?
- Is it interoperable and supporting a connected care environment?

Ignoring opportunities to improve your technology infrastructure can have a negative impact on patient loyalty and the overall perception of your organization. When a staff member has an adverse experience with the technology they use, it can have an impact the quality of care and an overall negative effect on the experience of the patient.

Five Key Areas to Revisit

60% of patients would rather search online than deal with hospital paperwork.¹⁰



4. Reporting and Data Analytics

A hospital fails to capture and manage paper-based information for reporting benchmarks and quality measures. In addition to reducing reimbursement and revenue, the inaccurate data influences a patient's choice to use another facility across town for an upcoming procedure.

Successfully capturing and understanding analytics can help you to hone in on what areas of the patient experience could be improved, as well as what processes are working well. Information that can be gathered through reporting includes readmission statistics, accurate documentation for reimbursements and even patient survey answers — all of which can shed light on important aspects of your organizational processes.

At the same time, it is important to plan and budget for tools that bring data into a structured format. (Keep in mind that many EHRs require additional tools for data reporting and analytics.) How you manage data affects benchmarks such as patient satisfaction ratings, cleanliness and reported outcomes including readmissions or successful treatments, which, in turn, affects the bottom line as well as patient satisfaction.

5. Robust Training

A hospital's train-the-trainer program was completed six months ago, yet a delayed system implementation means the trainers still have not actively used the system. As a result, they may not have retained enough information to effectively train others.

Creating and sustaining successful information flow across an organization depends on consistent training by people who understand healthcare processes. Consider designating "super users" with current, hands-on knowledge of the system. While knowing the basic tools and technology is a must, these trainers also will be able to adjust training as needed by troubleshooting. As a result of their findings they will be able to recalibrate to help the system work properly in a variety of areas and situations.

In addition, trainers also need a clear understanding of an organization's preferred work style. This includes: how care teams prefer to communicate; what tools they use; where information originates; when information is used; and the level of information accessibility at any time on any device.

Finally, a training program should include steps to measure performance and incentivize best practices. One way to achieve this is to include key performance indicators (KPIs) in annual training reviews for every medical professional — including physicians. These KPI's need to reflect an organization's clinical and business quality improvement objectives to improve patient care and adhering regulatory requirements.

¹⁰ https://www.ricoh-usa.com/news/news_release.aspx?prid=1554&alnv=pr

The Consequences of Not Considering Data



Regardless of how information is captured — whether on paper or electronically — without a strong data management plan in place some information will be missed, and it can negatively impact the patient experience. For example, if all required data is not captured up front as a patient goes through the organization, caregivers will not always have appropriate documentation to identify diseases and issues. Likewise, the business office may not have the correct data to produce an accurate and timely bill.

This can create a continuous cycle of not having the right information in the right place at the right time. Consequences might include risks to patient safety, lessened quality of care indicators and delayed referrals — all of which might further negatively influence the patient experience.

Missing data can impact not only the patient experience and care quality, but also business operations and claims submissions — which can reduce reimbursement and revenue. Poor business performance, combined with low patient experience ratings, can create negative press for a hospital and lead to a bad reputation, decreased market share and fewer admissions.

Excellent Patient Experiences Depend on Seamless Data

Improving the patient experience goes far beyond scripted responses and EHR technology; the most important factor in strengthening the patient experience is better communication.⁷ Successful communication between patients and caregivers generally entails having the appropriate systems in place to achieve information mobility so that you can efficiently capture, transform and manage data.

This requires looking beyond patient-facing tools such as the patient portal. Instead, hospitals and health systems need to consider all the behind-the-scenes data systems that can enrich communication. Remember that non-user-friendly technology can actually hurt the patient experience. For example, consider the effect on patient experience when a provider who tries to access test results and finds that the data is not available, forcing a delay in care and possibly leading to redundant and unnecessary procedures.

On the other hand, when you can seamlessly capture, transform and manage data, you can efficiently route information to the right place at the right time. That helps enhance the overall quality of care, which is the ultimate patient experience goal.

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⁷ <http://www.beckershospitalreview.com/quality/3-keys-to-improve-the-patient-experience-lower-costs.html>

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