Mind the Gaps: Improving Care Coordination with the Right Information at the Right Point in the Workflow

Strong information technology solutions, specifically designed for healthcare clinical settings, can complement existing care coordination workflows – and improve patient satisfaction along the way

Care coordination remains a global challenge in healthcare.

To provide the highest quality care to patients, provider organizations need to be able to coordinate both within and outside the walls of the hospital. They need to complete the various – and often complex – steps involved not only to schedule surgeries, collaborate with specialists and provide outside referrals, but also to connect with local service, rehabilitation and social work agencies. The multi-faceted nature of many coordination steps is not visible to the patient, but when they don't occur, for whatever reason, patient satisfaction suffers. As noted in a recent *BMJ Quality & Safety* study, hospitals that find ways to facilitate successful care coordination and transition strategies can translate those efforts into higher overall hospital ratings and higher Healthcare Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems (HCAHPS) scores – ultimately leading to larger payer reimbursements.[1]

Despite advances in electronic health records (EHRs), healthcare organizations still often struggle with getting the right information to the right place at the right time. In fact, a

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recent Commonwealth Fund study found only about half of primary care providers in the U.S. are notified when their patients have been seen in the emergency department or admitted to the hospital – vital information that is not only critical to future care decisions, but also how patients view their experience with the providers and healthcare organizations as a whole.[2] Far too often, important pieces of healthcare data fall through the cracks, frustrating patients who don't understand why a specialist can't see last week's diagnostic test result or why they were not offered a diabetic-friendly hospital menu while staying as an inpatient. Anita Harris, RN, Director of Clinical Informatics and Nursing Quality at Texas Children's Hospital, said standard technology platforms

don't always match up with how patients move throughout the health system. As such, gaps can and do occur.

"There are a lot of intricacies involved and many different events that need to happen to make sure a complex patient gets everything they need as they move through the system," she explained. "Patients often don't understand just how many stakeholders, from the nurses to the different doctors to the social workers, are actually involved – and why some of those touch points may be missed along the way."

Something as simple as a missed consult or visit with a healthcare team member can delay the discharge of a patient – sometimes by days.

Harris said that is extremely aggravating for families who are trying to perhaps balance time off from work and care for their families, all while managing the expectations of a young patient who just wants to go home. When those gaps happen, an organizations' HCAHPS scores will be affected.

"There are so many downstream impacts when you miss those engagement points," Harris said. "And so much of that comes from not being able to see what each patient needs and what prerequisites are needed to move those things along. But the patient doesn't see any of that. They just want what they need to happen."

Raja Bhadury, Global Lead of Care Delivery Solutions at HP Inc., said telehealth solutions are offering healthcare organizations new ways to hit such engagement points.

"Different members of the care team may be in different locations – even spanning different organizations," he said. "When clinicians have the ability to virtually collaborate using devices that were designed specifically for healthcare use – devices that come with noise cancellation, audio boost and enhanced video display features – it is easier to ensure all those touch points happen when they should."

Daniel Colling, RN, Global Lead Healthcare Industry Solutions and Practice at HP Inc., said advanced digitization methods, through the use of integrated interoperable technology, can also help healthcare providers mind common care coordination gaps.

"There's still so much reliance on fax to communicate critical information between providers and other healthcare staff, and it's difficult to determine if that request or information about a patient was even received," he explained. "But, with digital integrated imaging technology, as well as accompanying cloud-enabled solutions that can easily transmit and receive digital information through secure direct messaging with complete audit capabilities and can be integrated directly into the patient chart, all members of the care team can see the information they need at the point of care, as well as see what needs to happen next for the patient."

With HCAHPS serving as the voice of the patient, affecting reimbursements, as well as an organization's standing in the community, it's critical that provider organizations place new emphasis on optimizing care coordination efforts. Investing in smart devices and solutions that can better streamline the various processes that impact how patients and their families perceive and experience healthcare can assist in those efforts.

"Care coordination is a journey, not a destination," said Harris. "But, when you have the right information and right people when and where you need it, you can make sure the right engagement points happen and patients get the care they both expect and need."

HP is reinventing solutions to connect human intuition, compassion, and knowledge for the next generation of healthcare providers. Learn more about how advanced multifunction print technology can improve care coordination and improve the patient experience.

References
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