Managing Healthcare Paperwork in the Age of Data

TeloPoint

Defining the Problem

In healthcare today, there are very few things on which patients and providers alike can agree. One of the most troublesome has long been paperwork. Intake forms, HIPAA forms, treatment notes, and myriad others infuriate patients and create inefficiency for the providers who collect and record that data. The process involves many people, and every person who touches a form introduces the potential for errors that can perpetuate themselves downstream through the care continuum.

The visiting care field is especially vulnerable to the inefficiencies of paperwork. These dedicated professionals often cover large territories on their own, and yet are responsible for carefully documenting every visit in addition to performing their patient care duties. These responsibilities limit the number of patients care providers can see in a day and can create a difficult and stressful work experience. However, the alternative – careless or incomplete documentation – can result in financial penalties and lawsuits.

Unfortunately, this is all happening at a time when there is a great shortage of home care workers. There are currently over 4.9 million people relying on home health service providers, and with our society aging rapidly, home care has been ranked as one of the nation's fastest-growing occupations.

1. There are almost 5 million people relying on home health service providers.

2. With a rapidly aging society, home care is ranked as one of the nation's fastest-growing occupations.

3. By 2026, an additional million workers will be needed.

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Despite the frustrations on all sides, information management (IM) plays an important role in achieving positive patient outcomes for the

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visiting healthcare field. Too much information (information overload), too little information (information underload), and information coming from too many sources (information scatter) can all be detrimental to patient care. For patients in this sector, that often means longer time to achieve their specific targets, and can lead to hospitalization and hospital readmissions.

Among long list of day to day activities for visiting care professionals, forms and protocols may be among the first to receive a lower prioritization while patient care delivery needs take precedence. Unfortunately, during the day when visiting nurses are deployed around their territories, it is difficult for management to provide the necessary oversight to ensure compliance with those protocols, which can quickly run afoul of HIPAA regulations. That's a shame because management should be aware of the significant risk to their business should any personal health information (PHI) be leaked or stolen. Such an action could result in high costs, not least being a loss of business.

Turning to Technology for a Solution

So, if collecting data is critical but laborious, the answer would seem to lie in improving the process. Many providers are working to adopt tablets (iPads, et al.) as a means for collecting patient data, but simply upgrading the tools is not the same as improving the workflows. For example, providers have learned to use digital versions of their forms as a way to minimize their use of paper and improve their ability to store vital data. But this fails to take full advantage of the benefits of the digital age. The true solution lies in pairing technology with a better way to utilize it.

This is not a novel solution. In other industries, including the car rental industry, companies such as Enterprise have long been employing tablets to speed up their process, getting their customers in

a car quicker and more expediently than ever before.

The problem for healthcare is that unlike a car rental agency, handoffs of patient information take place frequently and between numerous partners, and each step requires a high degree of security. A care provider's treatment notes must be stored securely while being readily

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available to the patient's other caregivers. Orders must be sent to pharmacies, labs, and imaging centers. Billing information needs to reach a billing and coding team. And, appointments for future visits must be scheduled quickly.

Of course, the sensitive nature of PHI necessitates a high level of security. The digitized files contain valuable information that patients

trust will be well guarded and must remain protected. Common security practices include using a public IP address whitelist, multifactor authentication, robust password requirements, a VPN connection, and using separate computers for user applications and underlying data. But there's more. Securing patients' privacy requires sophisticated encryption of the files, both when stored and when transmitted from one party to another. This is no easy feat, as new cases of data theft and hacking are happening at an alarming rate. That is why good security requires continuous investment to stay current with, or even ahead of the current trends.

Finally, while the technological elements of digitizing data are obvious, the human element – training and correct utilization – share equal importance. Since practitioners are the ones who must implement the technology,

they must be competent at using it correctly, and understand the importance of using it consistently. Investing in a full training program is the best way to aid practitioners in this goal. Companies who choose to self-train, or "learn on the go," will typically see less benefit and are more likely to abandon the practice over time, wasting the time and money invested.

The healthcare industry is working on this, and companies such as One Medical have begun developing solutions to these problems. Like many high-tech care providers, One Medical has used their newfound efficiency to improve patient care: increasing the time spent with patients, ensuring their problems are all heard and addressed. One Medical's solution relies on being able to seamlessly integrate and share data with the many third-party agencies that partner with them to care for patients.

Achieving Adoption

Developing the solutions and workflows to aid visiting health practitioners is only part of the equation. These workflows must be properly adopted and implemented in order for providers to attain the

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complete benefits. The system must also be maintained for long-term success.

There are two main barriers to adoption for most practitioners. The first is simplicity and ease of use. While most practitioners will anticipate and submit to the need for some training for a new process, a new system that is perceived to be more complex than is reasonable will reject it altogether. The typical mindset is:

"if isn't broken, don't fix it," and the message is clear that any new ideas will be viewed with skepticism. For these providers, they must see that adoption can occur with minimal impact to their practice.

Another issue – one that should be no surprise to anyone – is price. Those in the healthcare field tend to focus more on upfront costs than long-term return on investment and balk at the cost of any new technology. Despite the constant need for healthcare, it is an unpredictable industry. Politics, business, and technology are all changing rapidly, potentially affecting healthcare payments and reimbursements. So, while touting a solution's long-term profitability is helpful, being able to show an immediate benefit, such as being able to treat more patients per day with improved accuracy and efficiency, will usually carry more weight.

About TeloChain

In our complex healthcare system, tedious processes and outmoded thinking can have an adverse effect on patient care. Telochain leverages its expertise in process automation and integrated strategies to empower providers to deliver high-quality care safer and more efficiently than ever before.

Summary

Storing and sharing personal health information could greatly benefit from improved workflows that center on technological solutions that reflect our current digital age. By replacing manual documentation steps with high-quality mobile applications and incorporating reliable security measures, an organization can enjoy the benefits of increased profit margins and lower risk of non-compliance with HIPAA guidelines.

For the healthcare providers themselves, the automation of back-office data processing can improve their performance significantly. By cutting steps they are able to reduce the amount of time spent on paperwork, freeing them to focus more on their patients, and even being able to see more patients per day. The result is a happier and more productive workforce that is better able to keep up with a growing patient population. And, a satisfied and well-trained workforce will be more capable of managing their patients and producing better outcomes.

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