3 keys to a successful healthcare communication platform.

Overview

When it comes to healthcare communication, no single software application can meet every need. To achieve seamless care collaboration, you need a comprehensive healthcare communication platform that provides multiple applications. To manage complex business functions, many market sectors have been shifting to a software platform model. Some platforms even offer development tools that allow companies to create their own applications.

To address the complexities of mission-critical communication, healthcare organizations can benefit from the platform approach. In the hospital environment, a breakdown in communication can have serious consequences. According to The Joint Commission, communication is consistently in the top three most frequently identified root causes of sentinel events.[1] To alleviate these risks, many hospitals are exploring ways to improve caregiver communication.

When upgrading from legacy phones, pagers or standalone texting apps, consider these three keys to a successful healthcare communication platform.

1. Multiple modes of communication.

Your staff needs more than one way to communicate: voice calls, secure text messages, and alarm and alert notifications. And those in different roles need different types of communication devices: shared smartphones for caregivers inside the hospital, personal devices for physicians and others outside the hospital, and a web client for desktop- or laptop-based staff.

- **Shared smartphones for point-of-care workers:** Look for a unified communication platform that equips caregivers with hospital-owned smartphones for voice calling, secure text messaging, and alarm and alert notifications – all on one powerful device. A dynamic directory is crucial so caregivers can find the right person at the right time, and get the support they need with a simple screen tap.

- **"Bring-your-own-device" solution for physicians and others outside the hospital:** To connect the entire care team, those working outside the hospital must be able to communicate easily with those inside. Replace the inefficiency of pagers and call-back loops with text messaging and direct phone connections. Physicians want to use their personal smartphones for seamless communication, without compromising HIPAA compliance. Choose a healthcare communication platform that supports a BYOD solution to keep physicians, administrators and others in the loop, and also keeps protected health information encrypted and protected, even in the case of a lost smartphone.

- **Web-based messaging for stationary staff:** Unit coordinators play a key role in keeping communication flowing smoothly and enabling caregivers to work efficiently. Others such as Pharmacists and Radiologists are also crucial to patient care, and need to stay connected to the rest of the care team. Your healthcare communication platform should ensure these desk-based workers can communicate quickly with your increasingly mobile staff. Look for a platform with desktop messaging for communication, and automatic alert notifications to relay important information such as lab results and room transfers.

2. Integration with third-party systems.

Your healthcare communication platform should not only unify multiple modes of communication, but also integrate with other healthcare technologies. To make the most of your investments, be sure any platform you consider can integrate with existing systems, including:

• Electronic medical records (EMR)

• Admissions, discharges and transfers (ADT)

• Nurse call systems

• Alarm middleware

A solid platform will go a long way toward promoting interoperability if it allows your IT team to take advantage of rules already built in other systems, and provides access to data in a way that shows the "big picture." If you can only see data from each vendor's system in a vacuum, your team won't benefit from a full view. Choose a healthcare communication platform that lets you look at caregiver texting and alarms coming from the nurse call system, for example, for alarm load data that gives a complete picture of your facility.

When shopping for a healthcare communication platform, also consider its ability to act as a launching point for deploying other vendors' applications or a development environment for creating custom workflows.

3. Support for future innovation.
A healthcare communication platform is not a one-time implementation project; rather, it should expand and grow to satisfy use cases other than its originally intended one. Many healthcare organizations start by rolling out a point-of-care communication solution, then expand that solution to those working outside the hospital. When communication is flowing smoothly, they add alarm and alert notifications from multiple systems.

Flexibility and future growth are key considerations. Just as many hospitals have started building on the capabilities of their EMR for more advanced technology integrations, you need a communication platform that can expand to support future initiatives. Individual

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units or teams may build a clinical workflow process based on the communication platform, for example, then pull data from the system to analyze and improve on that workflow.

In the quickly changing healthcare market, be sure to choose a communication platform that scales easily in response to organizational and structural changes. Make a sound investment in a solution that can support additional functionality as new technologies evolve.

Conclusion
Healthcare is slower than other industries to adopt technological advancements, and that's true of the platform model as well. Now that's starting to change with the availability of platforms suited specifically for mission-critical healthcare communication.

As hospitals begin to explore the benefits of a healthcare communication platform, it's important to choose a vendor that has successfully implemented and scaled its platform across the enterprise. While the software itself is vitally important, so is the ability to deploy that software successfully in the challenging healthcare environment. A well-seasoned vendor can also ensure a smooth integration of the communication platform with third-party systems your organization already uses. Long-term support and maintenance, as well as initial implementation services, can significantly improve success.

About Voalte

Voalte develops smartphone solutions that simplify caregiver communication. As the only company to offer a comprehensive Mobile Communication Strategy, Voalte enables care teams inside and outside the hospital to access and exchange information securely. Voalte customers benefit from a solid smartphone infrastructure that supports their existing systems and expands to accommodate future technologies. Founded in 2008, Voalte is a privately held company based in Sarasota, Florida. Over 75,000 caregivers use Voalte products every day. For more information, visit voalte.com or follow @Voalte on Twitter.

Source
1. "Sentinel Event Data Root Causes by Event Type, 2004 – 2Q 2014," The Joint Commission. http://www.jointcommission.org/assets/1/18/Root_Causes_by_Event_Type_2004-2014.pdf

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