Selecting Communications Solutions for Healthcare

A seven-step primer to help you adopt more effective, efficient and economical care strategies

A guide from Mitel

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Powering connections

Strengthen the conversation between healthcare providers and patients

With major shifts in the healthcare landscape and increasingly complex clinical workflows, it's more important than ever to adopt strategies that help you deliver more effective care to more patients while streamlining operations and meeting regulatory requirements.

New demands require new ways of communicating

The shift away from the fee-for-service model drives the need for more proactive and collaborative communications in hospitals, medical centers and physician practices. To remain viable as businesses and attract new patients in today's healthcare landscape, you must adopt communications solutions that help you:

- Simplify care coordination, reduce delays in delivering care, and eliminate bottlenecks in the care delivery chain
- Increase patient engagement, improve their ability to manage their own care, and increase their satisfaction levels with your care delivery
- Improve access to information for patients and everyone involved in their care delivery and make it easier for all involved to stay connected

With secure and reliable communications solutions that keep patients, physicians, staff and provider partners connected in real time, you are in a far better position to get the right information to the right people at the right time. And you will have the capabilities needed to address some of your biggest challenges, from managing the proliferation of staff-owned mobile devices to increasing staff and physician responsiveness.

Focus on core requirements

Evaluating all of the options available to improve communications in healthcare delivery can be daunting.

This primer describes seven steps that will help you select the communications solutions that best address your most urgent requirements.

Did you know?

Communication lapses can mean the difference between life and death.

In a U.S. malpractice study, CRICO Strategies reported that communication failures between medical staff and patients played a role in more than 1,700 patient deaths and $1.7 billion in malpractice costs during a five-year period. The same report highlighted that communication failures were a factor in 30 percent of the malpractice cases reviewed.

Malpractice Risks in Communication Failures: 2015 CRICO Strategies National CBS Report. CRICO Strategies is a research and analysis offshoot of the company that insures Harvard-affiliated hospitals.

1 Enable secure collaboration among all staff

Did you know?

- Multi-professional care teams spend at least 25 percent of their time on communications-based activities.

- First attempt voice-only calls fail 85 percent of the time in healthcare environments.

- 90 percent of staff bring their personal smart devices to work.

- 73 percent of staff send and receive work-related texts.

- Of 1,000 physicians surveyed, 95 percent frequently use text messages.

Sources: KLAS Wireless Security Report, KU Medical School Survey, Spyglass Consulting Report, FierceMobileHealthcare

When on-site nurses, dispersed physicians, and non-clinical staff can quickly, easily and securely share information in real time, the entire care cycle becomes more effective and efficient.

It's no secret that most healthcare professionals are already using their own mobile devices to text their coworkers about job-related topics. Texting is an incredibly fast and efficient way to communicate on the job. It helps staff avoid the delays and frustrations associated with unanswered phone calls and telephone tag. But unless texting capabilities are implemented in a way that complies with regulatory requirements, these communications can put information security and privacy at risk.

The need for real-time collaboration in healthcare environments extends well beyond texting. In most cases, care planning involves multiple stakeholders — physicians, nurses, radiologists, lab technicians, nutritionists, physiotherapists and others. When the entire team can quickly connect by voice, video and text to organize tasks and share files, productivity increases and the potential for communication lapses and gaps in care decreases.

The ability for physicians and nurses to securely collaborate with staff who do not have the access

privileges required to see information in the electronic medical records (EMR) system is particularly important to avoid gaps in care.

But the need for instantaneous, secure collaboration is never more important than when care team members need to come together as quickly as possible to address a code call.

Five key capabilities to look for

Look for multimodal collaboration capabilities that keep everyone connected with the same user experience and can be accessed from desktop computers, smartphones and tablets:

- Team collaboration applications that use virtual rooms and dashboards to simplify and accelerate task coordination and file sharing
- Team conferencing applications that support participation using voice, video and text
- Secure messaging applications that include customizable availability settings and preferred contact methods
- Schedule-based routing capabilities to direct urgent calls to assigned on-call staff
- Solutions that support end-to-end encryption to ensure secure data transmissions at all times

2   Increase the efficiency of clinical workflows

Using communications to streamline clinical workflows and automate repetitive tasks improves and accelerates patient evaluations, treatments, transfers and discharge planning.

When bedside clinicians can easily reach each other, dispersed specialists and remote stakeholders, patient evaluations, diagnoses, and treatment decisions are more informed and efficient. Whenever needed, clinicians can spontaneously initiate secure care planning meetings that can be joined by colleagues and experts using any medium on any device from any location.

Later, when it is time to coordinate the care required for patient transfer, handoff or discharge, the ability to communicate and collaborate using multiple channels rather than just voice simplifies complex workflows and accelerates management of repetitive tasks.

Solutions that can convert one type of communication to another also increase communications efficiency to reduce the delays that often occur at care transition points. Instead of struggling to get through all of the various steps required for each transition, care coordination staff are empowered to deliver patient-centered, accountable care.

Five key capabilities to look for

Look for communications solutions that offer:

- Click-to-talk capabilities from within clinical applications
- Customized voice and text profiles that are aligned with clinical workflows
- Predefined call routes to connect external agencies with case managers
- Customizable voice and text messages that can be integrated into the clinical information system
- Text-to-speech capabilities that can be integrated into the mobile messaging platform

Did you know?

Reducing workflow delays shortens average discharge times and improves patient perceptions of care and satisfaction.

More efficient workflows also help you meet the core competency requirements for patient experience, quality of care, and readmission rates outlined in the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (PPACA).

3   Improve patient engagement after discharge

Enhancing the communications capabilities provided in web portals helps ensure that patients follow discharge orders, attend post-discharge appointments, and engage in other post-treatment activities. It also helps to increase patient satisfaction by reducing wait times and helping patients feel more engaged in their own care. And it helps you keep operating costs down while ensuring that physicians and nurses can address the most critical patient queries in the timeliest way possible.

Today, most patient portals include the ability for patients and physicians or nurses to exchange written communications. However, there are typically delays between patient questions and clinical responses. Adding click-to-chat and click-to-call capabilities to patient portals improves access and response times between patients and healthcare providers.

With click-to-chat, patients can simply click an icon to initiate a chat session with an assigned nurse agent. For patients that prefer traditional voice collaboration, click-to-call enables them to simply enter the phone number at which they can receive a call back from their provider.

Integrated voice response (IVR) technology also enhances the patient experience and helps ensure patients get the information or assistance they need.

For example, IVR can be used to support automated bill payments, prescription refills and other patient service tasks. This type of collaboration solution takes the patient's question and provides interactive menus to help them navigate to the information they're looking for. IVR technology is also an ideal way to provide self-service for patients who need help, but do not want to chat with or talk to a healthcare representative in person.

Adding integrated voice and chat capabilities to physician portals offers similar benefits. Physicians have faster access to the information and insight needed to provide optimal care while making more efficient use of their time.

Five key capabilities to look for

Look for communications solutions that offer:

- Call-me-now capabilities
- Web chat capabilities
- An IVR engine
- Call routing based on variable patient identifiers
- Dual persona technology to segregate patient and personal communications on mobile devices

Did you know?

It pays to enhance patient portals:

- Enhanced portal features can help you maintain the 5 percent patient portal utilization threshold required to meet **Stage 2** of the meaningful use incentive program.
- Online bill payments using web portals with telephony features shorten accounts receivable timelines and improve patient satisfaction.

4   Look beyond portals to keep patients engaged

While your patient portal is crucial to providing patients with access to critical health information and staff expertise, you also need solutions that help you manage the high volumes of inbound and outbound patient calls that occur outside of the patient portal. With a patient access center, you can proactively and efficiently engage and support patients with diverse pre- and post-treatment needs to lower unnecessary readmissions, increase patient volumes and grow revenues.

A patient access center enables you to:

- Increase call handling efficiency by automatically directing patient calls to the right department, whether it's a clinical question or a billing inquiry
- Reduce the number of patient appointment no-shows with automated appointment reminders
- Reduce the chance of readmissions by using proactive voice, email, and chat communications to track patient recovery and send reminders about prescription refills

- Make better use of resources by ensuring that clinical staff remain focused on the most critical patient queries while general and administrative queries are handled with automated messages and contact center agents
- Increase scheduling efficiency with centralized multi-site patient scheduling
- Optimize patient calls with data about the patient's call history

Five key capabilities to look for

Look for contact center solutions that offer:

- Customizable call flows and routing plans
- Automated outbound dialing for patient notifications
- Time-dependent call handling to manage heavy call volumes
- Screen-pop data related to the current call
- Monitoring and reporting capabilities for call quality and wait-time analysis

Did you know?

Proactive communications can boost revenues:

- Missed patient appointments average 23 percent to 34 percent for medical practices nationwide, with a significant loss of income as a result.

- Automated outbound patient notification calls reduce patient no-shows by more than 30 percent.

Source: Medical Group Management Association (MGMA)

5   Consider what the cloud can offer

Did you know?

The cloud is on the rise in healthcare:

- 42 percent of hospitals now invest in cloud-based implementations.

- Between 2014 and 2015, the number of healthcare organizations using cloud-based applications jumped from 8 percent to 37 percent.[2]

- Of 5,700 practices surveyed, 83 percent of respondents indicated that cloud-based electronic health records (EHRs) are the single biggest tech trend.[2]

[1] IDC, Business Strategy: Trends and Opportunities in the U.S. Healthcare Provider Market — A Discussion of the 2015–2016 Healthcare Provider Technology Spend Survey Results, Doc #us40883115, January 2016.
[2] Fierce Healthcare, Black Book Market Research.

With the simplicity, flexibility, and cost-savings that cloud services can offer, more and more healthcare organizations are choosing to deploy Communications Platform as a Service (CPaaS) solutions rather than on-site solutions.

With CPaaS, communications and collaboration applications are delivered over the internet by a third-party company to save the costs and hassles associated with deploying and managing the applications yourself. A cloud-based delivery model allows you to enhance business applications, such as clinical software, with real-time voice, video and messaging capabilities to enable features such as automated notifications, click-to-call and multifactor authentication.

CPaaS deployments help you ensure that the communications and collaboration capabilities your teams rely on are:

- Always available
- Easily upgradable to support new capabilities
- Scalable to support expanding operations
- Funded through operational expense (OPEX) budgets rather than capital expense (CAPEX) budgets, which have far more stringent approval requirements

A CPaaS approach also gives you the flexibility to build applications or embed communications capabilities such as voice and Short Message Service (SMS) into existing applications with application programming interfaces (APIs) that can address almost any requirement.

Five key capabilities to look for

Look for cloud-based communications solutions that offer:

- A carrier-class network with multiple best practices in place to ensure maximum security
- 24/7/365 monitoring and support with stringent service level agreements (SLAs) and financial penalties when SLAs are violated
- Secure support for employee bring your own device (BYOD) programs across all device types and locations
- User-friendly applications that encourage use, require little training and administration, and are managed and delivered from within HIPAA-certified environments
- Scalability and adaptability to easily evolve with your operations

6   Ensure compliance with regulatory requirements

Patient privacy is a critical concern, especially in light of the strengthened privacy and security regulations mandated in the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA). No matter which communications solutions you choose, and whether they are premises-based or cloud-based, they must enable you to meet regulatory requirements.

With communications solutions that provide the security needed to meet regulatory requirements, you can:

- Comply with rigid data security regulations while improving the effectiveness and efficiency of your operations
- Automate management of Hospital Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems (HCAHPS) surveys and other confidential post-discharge actions
- Enable IT staff to take advantage of HIPAA-compliant voice and SMS capabilities to streamline common IT tasks, such as implementing system alerts and two-factor authentication

To provide the capabilities described above, communications solutions should be based on a robust, multi-layer security framework that provides numerous physical and technical safeguards that are enforced by stringent administrative policies.

The security framework should be designed by a dedicated information security team that will continue to monitor and assess its capabilities over the long term to ensure that solutions remain compliant as regulations change. And it should be HIPAA-certified by independent compliance assessment experts.

Five key capabilities to look for

Look for communications solutions that offer:

- HIPAA certification
- Payment Card Industry Data Security Standard (PCI-DSS) compliance
- Sarbanes-Oxley Act (SOX) compliance
- SSAE 16-compliant data centers for cloud solutions
- Routine audits to ensure compliance is maintained

Did you know?

HIPAA-certified communications solutions require extensive security features, including:

- Call recording encryption
- Strict access controls
- Access logging capabilities
- Auditing and reporting systems
- Three configurable data sensitivity levels for collected data:
    » Confidential: Normal access control
    » Highly confidential: Restricted access
    » Highly confidential: Encrypted, no user access

The right vendor partner can help you select the deployment approach and communications solutions that are best suited to your patient, staff and operational requirements and your short- and long-term business goals.

The vendor must be able to demonstrate that they understand the many process intricacies and regulations in the healthcare industry as well as the critical role that communications plays in helping to ensure successful patient outcomes. This depth of knowledge can only be provided by a vendor with deep experience and a proven reputation in the healthcare field.

Five key capabilities to look for

Look for a vendor that can offer high-quality, reliable, secure and easy-to-use solutions at a competitive price, including:

- The flexibility to support on-site, cloud and hybrid deployment scenarios using a single solution that is easy to deploy, manage and use

- A consistent user experience for patients, staff and healthcare partners no matter which deployment scenario is used

- A full suite of communications applications that you can gradually adopt as your needs evolve

- An enterprise-grade telephony and unified communications experience

- Seamlessly integrated solutions that make life easier for IT and can be customized to work with existing medical systems and applications

Did you know?

Mitel is a highly experienced and trusted provider of communications solutions for healthcare:

- 1,500 physician practices rely on Mitel solutions.

- 200 hospitals and healthcare centers rely on Mitel solutions

- Mitel consistently outperforms the competition in customer satisfaction, customer loyalty, value and lowest total cost of operations (TCO).

To find a partner that can help you choose the right healthcare solution for your organization, visit **mitel.com/partners**.

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