

SPOK AND MEANINGFUL USE



SPOK MEANINGFUL USE

It is easy for hospitals to get bogged down in the details of Meaningful Use for electronic health records (EHRs).

However, the concept that should be kept in the forefront is that the one goal shared by all these varied technologies and practices is improved patient care and greater patient satisfaction. While process automation and data shared throughout the organization will create tremendous efficiencies, nothing will ever take the place of the physician's touch, a good doctor interacting directly with a patient.

Technology serves as an enhancement to this interaction through a better-informed physician, improved response times, electronically documented and logged transactions, and so forth. While advancements such as EHRs establish the data source for the well-informed caregiver, the challenge of getting this data to the clinician remains.

Many advancements such as EHRs allow caregivers to become efficient to the point where they are able to attend to more patients, as hospitals (like the rest of us) try to do more with less. However, the tradeoff becomes that physicians and nurses are covering more real estate. Do communications suffer?

The prescription is to add technology to address the mobility and fast pace of caregiver-to-caregiver information exchange needed today.

SPOK + EHR IN ACTION

Tracking Requests for Lab Results

Let's use as an example the recommendation concerning lab results being maintained as structured data within the EHR. Improving the workflow surrounding lab ordering and results is an area which could result in time savings for physicians. Tightening up this process can also ensure that abnormal results be acted upon immediately and effectively.

Dr. Lee may be accustomed to and comfortable with writing down lab orders and handing them off to a lab technician for fulfillment. This may simply be the way she's done this for years. With the hospitals' need to demonstrate Meaningful Use, Dr. Lee may now be required to submit lab orders electronically via a computerized physician order entry (CPOE) system. This represents a major change for Dr. Lee, who prefers to do things her usual way.

By adding Spok® solutions into the equation, the "sting" of learning to do something a new way can be tempered by the benefit seen in a lab order fulfillment confirmation being sent to the doctor's smartphone. Now the loop has been closed, and Dr. Lee will have confirmation that her lab order has been fulfilled per her instructions, rather than simply assuming this has taken place. In the event of abnormal results, Dr. Lee can be notified immediately via her smartphone, and can just as quickly send a message to a specialist whose consult is needed based on the abnormal result.

In addition, Dr. Lee knows that with this CPOE + Spok system in place, there is a full audit trail available, clearly showing the lab order she had placed, along with the lab's confirmation. The message interaction between Dr. Lee and the specialist for the consult is also recorded for accountability purposes.

Patient Reminders

Another key area for Meaningful Use recommendations is patient reminders, with the goal being to provide these electronically to those patients who prefer them. Patient reminders can take several forms, including delivery via phone, email, or SMS text. This is an area where Spok offers applications which directly contribute to meeting Meaningful Use requirements, as our notification solution can use your existing patient directory information and initiate scheduled

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reminder calls or other text-based messages. The system can require a response from the recipient, and can track responses for reporting purposes.

Looking forward, Spok is exploring ways in which we can directly integrate with EHR systems. With patient reminders, we see an automated method of receiving HL7 updates of appointments which have been scheduled, and taking that data and populating not only our own systems, but EMR systems as well, for seamless data sharing

HOW SPOK SOLUTIONS FIT INTO THE MEANINGFUL USE PUZZLE

Electronic Health Records Are an Improvement, But Not a Panacea

An EHR system can contain a bevy of essential patient details and helpful information, but it will be useless if it's not accessed and acted upon by the caregivers involved with a patient's care. In particular, when a patient is in the hospital and experiences rapid changes in vitals or other health metrics, details logged in the EHR need to reach the right nurse or doctor for effective treatment. Caregivers will also need to interact with one another to determine the best course of action. These person-to-person communications that happen alongside the EHR are critical—but often inefficient.

The ability of nurses and doctors to get in touch regarding questions, clarifications, and a myriad of other reasons is a well-documented challenge. Researchers from the University of Maryland's Center for Health Information and Decision Systems (CHIDS) estimate that U.S. hospitals waste \$12 billion each year due to poor communications. This spans areas such as difficulties for nurses and doctors to connect and also for nurses to identify the right attending physician when needed.¹

Likewise, a Cisco study carried out by Zogby International found that of the 253 nurses surveyed, 86 percent said they spent as much as two hours on a given shift "chasing other people to get answers." Forty-eight percent responded that "care team availability and location" was needed from a point-of-care communications device to improve communications among staff.²

How Critical Communication Technology Speeds Care

Healthcare communication technology can provide some of the answers today's hospital teams seek in these concerning areas. Spok enables hospitals to take their EHR systems a step further by empowering staff with communication tools that facilitate interactions quickly and easily. This means not only bringing communication infrastructure such as Web-based on-call schedules and emergency notifications into the mix, but also smartphones and other devices carried by staff. Everything—and everyone—work together in this environment with the goal of improved patient outcomes.

The need to improve upon EHR information with the right communication tools is clear. These are areas where communication technology can make critical improvements in everyday processes.

- **Web-based directories and on-call scheduling:** Having on-call schedules and staff contact information available via the Web speeds the ability to get the right people in touch and eliminates calling the wrong person at the wrong time.
- **Operator consoles:** Automated methods of call processing help contact centers manage call volumes better, including inquiries from staff and deployment of code calls when needed.
- **Mass/emergency notification:** Whether a department administrator or the operator group launches a code call, the message needs to reach the right people at the right time on the right devices. This means having emergency notification tools integrate with on-call schedules and staff contact information to ensure accuracy and speed. Two-way communications and automated response tracking are also key. Similarly, notification of upcoming appointments can be sent to patients to ensure continuity of care, particularly for cases where ongoing monitoring is essential.
- **Smartphone messaging:** As smartphone use skyrockets, being able to send messages to these devices in addition to pagers, Wi-Fi phones, and voice badges is critical. Encrypted communications and an audit trail of all messages help fill in information that EHR systems don't track.
- **Integration from clinical monitoring systems to staff's mobile devices:** Part of speeding patient response and keeping safety high includes fast action when patient vitals go outside appropriate parameters. Middleware relays alerts and alarms from nurse call, patient monitoring, and other systems on the appropriate caregiver's mobile device to ensure quick action.

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How Critical Communication Technology Speeds Care

As the technology offerings—and requirements—for hospitals continue to grow, we must all remember to look at the entire picture to determine what's needed for effective patient care. Electronic health record systems offer incredible opportunities for consolidated patient histories and information sharing among caregivers and their various hospital networks. But even if 'Meaningful Use' is achieved according to the guidelines established by the government, there are still ways to push patient care levels even higher by improving communications among physicians, nurses and others involved in patient care. With the right communication solutions in place next to EHR systems, caregivers can better connect to maximize use of the valuable information the patient record contains. In this way, staff become more efficient and patients receive better care

1 <http://www.healthcarefinancenews.com/press-release/us-hospitals-waste-12-billion-annually-because-poor-communication>

*2 Dare, Francis. *The High Cost of Nurses' Communication Challenges*, 2009, Cisco Internet Business Solutions Group*