In this eBrief we look at why increasing the efficiency of critical test results management (CTRM) is of vital importance for your organization and your patients.
INTRODUCTION

There is an unfortunate pattern being played out in many hospitals today. Doctors order many diagnostic tests for their patients (CT scans, MRI exams, mammograms, various blood tests, and much more) to help with diagnosis. And yet the results of these tests are often not reaching the right clinicians quickly enough. In rare cases, critical results are even lost or sent to the wrong person, significantly delaying diagnosis and treatment. Although there is excellent technology for reviewing and diagnosing abnormalities, the processes for actually communicating these abnormalities to the right people is lacking. According to an article in the American College of Radiology Bulletin, figuring out who to alert, and how to alert them, can be challenging. Furthermore, the article states that “… failure to communicate findings properly can harm the patient or lead to malpractice claims.”

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American College of Radiology Bulletin

**Potential Impact of Poorly Handled Test Results**

- INCREASED LENGTH OF STAY
- DELAYS IN CARE
- CONTINUATION OF INCORRECT TREATMENT
- POTENTIAL PATIENT HARM
- INCREASED COSTS
- POTENTIAL INCREASE IN MALPRACTICE SUITS
Test results can mean everything when people are in the hospital and worrying about what’s happening to them. Every minute counts when it comes to having tests interpreted and the results sent to the ordering physician. In the case of critical lab or radiology results, the faster the results are relayed, the faster the treatment can begin. Even for normal results, quick delivery can give peace of mind, or perhaps help doctors rule out several possible problems in their efforts to diagnose a condition.

Sue’s physician, Dr. Jones, orders a radiological exam.

Results entered into the CTRM system

Results are critical - Sue’s physician must be notified

EMR Sue Smith

**THE FIVE REASONS**

**PATIENT CARE MAY BE SUFFERING**

National Patient Safety Goal (NPSG) #2

Improve the effectiveness of communication among caregivers.

NPSG.02.03.01

Report critical results of tests and diagnostic procedures on a timely basis.

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**PHYSICIANS, NURSES, AND STAFF ARE WASTING TIME THEY DON’T HAVE TO SPARE**

Whether we’re talking about the doctors ordering tests for patients or the radiologists or lab personnel evaluating scans, blood work and more, there are communication delays that simply aren’t necessary—or acceptable—with the technology available today.

Test results—whether within normal ranges or not—need to be delivered quickly to physicians to improve their ability to treat patients. An automated method of communicating results eliminates phone tag with the radiology and lab departments and speeds the patient’s treatment plan. For radiologists, less time wasted calling around to reach the ordering physician means more opportunity to review scans/exams. As a radiologist’s time is expensive, this is something every hospital needs to evaluate.

Your hospital needs a solution that is flexible. The solution needs to fit into your existing workflow pattern and truly support staff versus making things more difficult with unfamiliar processes. Secure, traceable results that come to a smartphone or other specified device are much simpler for all.

Critical Test Results System Feeds Communication
MISHANDLING CRITICAL TEST RESULTS CAN LEAD TO MALPRACTICE SUITS AND PAYOUTS, AND IRREPARABLE DAMAGE TO YOUR ORGANIZATION’S REPUTATION

All hospitals are looking to avoid mistakes, lawsuits, and expensive settlements, which can cause a loss of trust in the community and potentially reduce reimbursements. Between 1996 and 2003, malpractice payments related to diagnosis increased by approximately 40 percent, and a significant cause in this form of litigation was failure in communication.²

CTRM software is an effective way to improve communications among staff, particularly with the closed-loop aspect of the messages. Having an audit trail with all message contents, date/time stamps, delivery confirmations, and acknowledgments goes a long way to prevent mistakes and help retrace steps if needed. It can be powerful evidence of properly followed processes in the event a claim is made. In addition to this audit trail, updating the hospital’s electronic medical record (EMR) system with the fact that the result has been both delivered and acknowledged by the physician is of notable value.

In addition to protecting patients, some hospitals are looking to add sound communication practices and technology to achieve a reduction in their malpractice premiums.

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American College of Radiology Bulletin
The Joint Commission's National Patient Safety Goal #2 requires hospitals to “report critical results of tests and diagnostic procedures on a timely basis.” Having the audit trail is critical here, as is the ability to send encrypted results information from the CTRM system straight to a smartphone, tablet, or other device. And a system that has powerful analytics and report generation capabilities can help prepare you for your Joint Commission inspection. In addition, HIPAA and the HITECH Act have guidelines for maintaining the security of patient information in a mobile device-driven world.

Help speed patient discharge and shorten overall length of stay

As hospitals move from fee-for-service models to payment for quality outcomes, reducing the lengths of patient stays is even more critical than ever. A critical test results management system that can quickly alert ordering physicians about a normal finding means the patient may be released sooner, whether from the ED or after admittance to the hospital. Improving bed turnover rates is an important initiative for many hospitals, and faster communications among staff help meet this goal.

“During the three months immediately following implementation, we saw an 11 percent improvement in patient discharge times.”
José Bennett
PACS Administrator,
Palmetto Health Tuomey

Case Study
Learn how Palmetto Health Tuomey speeds patient discharge times and relays test results to physicians faster.

Learn More »
As with many workflows in hospitals today, technology has become necessary due to the sheer volume of information that needs to be amassed, sent, archived, and protected. The idea is to find critical test results management technology that supports your physicians, radiology, and lab personnel as they order, evaluate, send, and track patient test information. Inflexible solutions where workflows are defined by vendors will frustrate staff, who may create workarounds.

“We chose [Spok] because it’s not a cookie-cutter solution; we can tailor it to QHC. It works in all the diagnostic areas we report for —Cardiopulmonary, Radiology, and the Laboratory, and will provide efficiencies in the diagnostics and ER departments alike.”
— Dianna Kiss, PACS Coordinator, Quinte Health Care

TECHNOLOGY CAN HELP

Dr. Jones orders x-rays and labs

Results are critical - ordering physician must be notified

Results are sent directly to physician’s phone

Results are sent to multiple devices

EMR audit trail

Escalations can be set

Critical Test Results
CONCLUSION

As workers become more mobile, good communication has become more important than ever. The risks are great for hospitals that don't have effective processes for the critical test results workflow. Malpractice suits have more than quadrupled over the past decade for many reasons, including communication failures. Failure to communicate the right information to the right person can lead to patient harm and increased costs. Having a strong critical test results process and technology in place helps to improve patient care and safety. It can also enhance physician, nursing and staff productivity, and aid your hospital in protecting its reputation.

VIDEO
This video shows how lab results can be delivered quickly and efficiently to ordering physicians.

WATCH NOW »

VIDEO
This video shows how Critical Test Results Management can improve delivery of radiology results to appropriate clinicians.

WATCH NOW »
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