

# Healthcare Guide to **Platform vs.** Point Solutions

Are numerous, disjointed communication and  
IT solutions creating challenges at your hospital?  
**You're not alone.**

Many healthcare organizations are cobbling together their clinical communications from several vendors and grappling with the resulting costs and frustrations.

Explore the evolution of hospital systems and learn why an integrated, enterprise-wide communication platform promotes care team collaboration and improves patient outcomes.



# Burdened with disparate communications? Don't invest in piece-by-piece technology.

In recent years, healthcare has experienced a paradigm shift with the transition from volume- to value-based care. Healthcare organizations are now incentivized to provide the best possible care at the lowest price.

This has many hospitals and health systems changing their business models, considering mergers or acquisitions, and evaluating workflows and other process improvements. Hospitals are now engaged in strategies that focus on creating integrated systems.

Many healthcare organizations are trying to solve each problem separately; for example, by assembling their hospital communications piece by piece, with several different vendors. Often, each department purchases, maintains, and rolls out separate solutions.

This piecemeal approach means valuable data from one system might not be shared with or influence a workflow managed by another system, creating inefficiencies across the enterprise. There is also a high total cost of ownership to support each of these systems, and they're difficult to scale with the growth of the organization.

When information must be delivered quickly and securely into the hands of the clinicians who need to act on it, true interoperability is required for numerous disconnected systems to share information throughout the hospital. These systems span everything from EHRs, on-call scheduling, directories, patient care assignment, nurse call, and biomedical devices—to real-time location systems and other facility systems and services, such as transport and HVAC system temperature monitors.

The challenge for healthcare is to use the right technology, applied in the right way. Jonathan Bush and John Fox of Athenahealth describe this as the “network effect”—or more specifically, bringing the power of platforms to healthcare.<sup>1</sup>

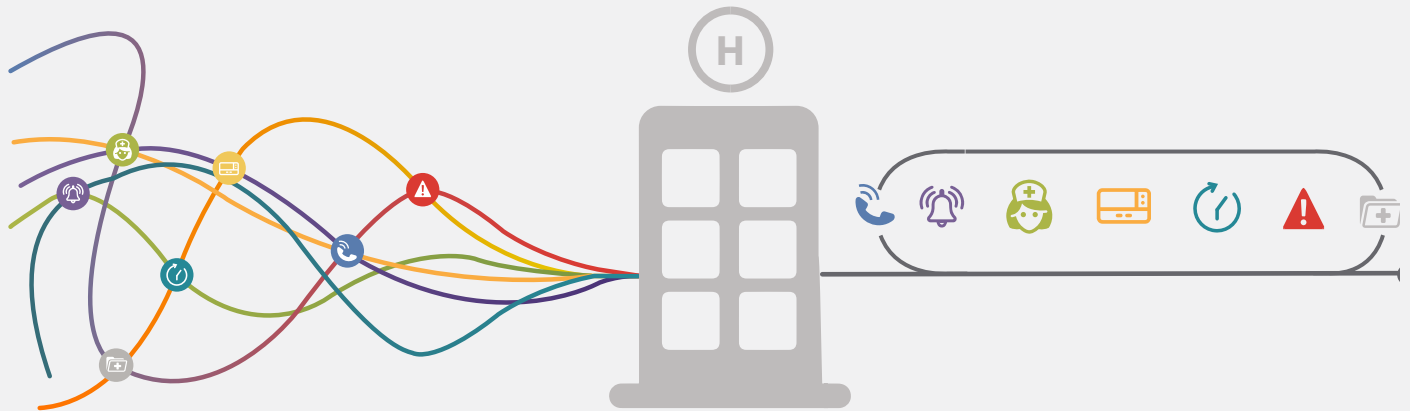
Any platform, at its core, is a holistic system built on a shared infrastructure driven by data and multiple user interactions—bringing together people, processes, policies, and networked technology.<sup>2</sup>

When considering new technology, healthcare executives are looking for robust platforms, with cloud computing and Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) top of mind as they look to cut costs and improve operational efficiency.<sup>3</sup>

“ Platforms bring together people, processes, policies and networked technology to create a holistic system. ”

Jeroen Tas, Royal Philips  
(World Economic Forum May 21, 2018<sup>4</sup>)

# Point solutions vs. platform: What's the difference?



## Point Solutions

Address and respond to one specific need, often functioning in isolation and only solving a small piece of a very complex puzzle.

## Platform

A complete end-to-end solution with seamless information-sharing, which provides the situational awareness required to be fully real-time and patient-centric.

Today healthcare organizations face numerous challenges with hundreds of different applications used within the walls of the hospital.

CIOs must ensure these systems are compliant with HIPAA and other regulatory requirements. IT departments are faced with increasing expectations around mobility, such as Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) policies, mobile device management (MDM), and wireless infrastructures—not to mention interoperability. Clinicians say they're bogged down by too many alarms and alerts. And hospital operators simply want to know who's on call and if they can automate the notification process.

Suffice to say, hospitals are dealing with multiple disparate data sources that often don't talk with one another. This impacts the productivity of

your clinicians and your staff—and that, in turn, impacts patient care.

A siloed, point-solutions-based approach is far from ideal. Hospitals find themselves trying to integrate several clinical communication solutions from any number of different vendors.

When this happens, hospitals often find they can't efficiently dictate the path that information flows end-to-end, whether that's a simple consult request generated by one clinician to another, or a critical biometric alert that must be immediately acted on by a patient's entire care team.

Why? Because totally separate data sources (directory, schedules, preferences, etc.) are not connected and are not exchanging the valuable information that powers care team collaboration.

# Challenge for healthcare:

## The right technology, applied in the right way.

### Consider how poor communication affects patient care

The statements below describe the core clinical problems that an enterprise-wide communication platform solves for three very important roles within the hospital. Keep these in mind as you learn more about the platform approach to care team collaboration.



"As a **care team member**, I need to communicate my questions, requests, and intent with other people taking care of the patient as quickly and efficiently as possible."



"As a **patient**, when an important event happens, I want the people caring for me to have enough information to take immediate action, so I receive the highest quality of care as quickly as possible."



"As a **hospital leader**, I need to prove that patient events are being acted on. I must optimize those processes to ensure my organization delivers an exceptional patient experience with the highest level of care quality and patient safety at the lowest cost possible."

# Supporting faster, easier care team collaboration.

Hospitals don't have to look at their IT systems as individual, unrelated challenges, and they shouldn't have to bend their workflows to meet the requirements of rigid point solutions.

Technology should support the workflow, not the other way around. It's possible for one unified technology platform to help solve multiple challenges across different areas and departments of the hospital.

A robust, well-established communication and collaboration platform is solidly rooted in the organization to interoperate with hospital systems to support faster, easier, more actionable care team collaboration wherever caregivers are and on whatever device they're using. It helps improve workflows across the hospital, from the contact center to the patient's bedside; and from doctors and nurses to housekeeping and transport staff.

## Value delivered by solving this communication problem

### A patient is getting ready for discharge

Using a point-solution approach, a discharge order is entered in the EHR, but then requires manual, independent communication by caregivers and other staff members to complete the discharge process. For instance, the patient's attending physician may need to confer with a specialist to get any discharge notes and their approval that the patient may be discharged. Often it becomes a nurse's responsibility to track down the appropriate specialists to get their approval and report back to the attending.

In contrast, a communication platform promptly notifies appropriate personnel to facilitate handoffs and begin required tasks through connectivity with the EHR—automating the tasks that need to be done at discharge.



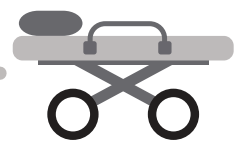
Dr. Colletti enters discharge order in EHR.



Care team notified to start the discharge process.



When patient is ready to leave, transport services and housekeeping are automatically notified on their mobile devices that the patient is ready to depart and the room can be prepared for the next patient.



Bed is available for next patient.

# The EHR: A data powerhouse and a platform too.

In healthcare, there was a time when the medical profession existed without the EHR, when multi-departmental solutions that didn't connect with one another and paper-based information were the norm. Before the EHR, the systems within hospitals were disparate, disconnected, unable to effectively exchange information. Today, you wouldn't imagine having a pharmacy system separate from your order system.

Many EHR vendors have built or acquired components to leverage the platform for as many uses as possible. Cerner, currently used by more than 27,000 provider facilities in 35 countries, has invested over \$6.3 billion in R&D.<sup>5</sup>

A closer look at the Cerner family tree reveals over two dozen acquisitions (estimated at \$1.7 billion) since 1992, including solutions from laboratory automation and retail pharmacy systems, to clinical decision support, workforce

automation, and PACS.<sup>6</sup> Everything is now housed within the EHR.

In a recent Black Book Research study, 86 percent of hospital network users expressed confidence for EHR-centric vendors providing single-source solutions for EHR, revenue cycle management, and population health.<sup>7</sup>

The allure for an "all-in-one" unified EHR platform is enhanced data visibility and holistic patient management, in addition to providing higher confidence their organization is prepared for value-based care and the challenges of risk-based reimbursement.<sup>8</sup>

This trend away from point solutions continues. The days of disparate technologies won't last in healthcare due to data interface issues, which compromise patient safety and outcomes.



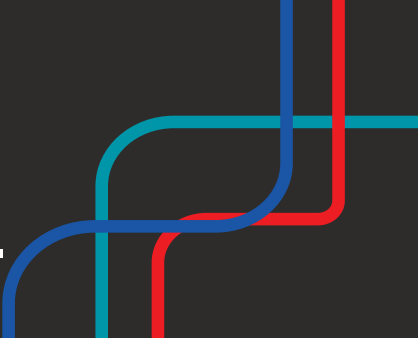
## Point Solutions

1990s Disparate Systems: Lab, Imaging, Radiology, ED, Critical Care, Cardiology, Pharmacy, Interface Engines, Patient Portal

## Platform

Today's Centralized EHR

# What's next? A system of action to complement the system of record.



Although the EHR is an excellent repository of patient data, it's not ideal for sharing actionable information in time-sensitive scenarios. As of July 2017, 96 percent of the 4,520 non-federal acute care hospitals have a 2014 certified edition EHR system.<sup>9</sup> However, while nearly every hospital has adopted a certified EHR system, only 6.4 percent have effectively adopted it and matured it to HIMSS stage 7 of the EMR Adoption Model<sup>SM</sup> where paper charts are no longer used.<sup>10</sup>

When Spok asked healthcare CIOs about their current technology priorities, 38 percent said their focus was optimizing EHR integration with other hospital systems.<sup>11</sup> Clearly, there is still much to be done for EHRs to fulfill their promise and to realize the full potential of healthcare digitization.

What's needed is a system of action capable of pulling the right information, adding context, and delivering it to the right person to act on in near real-time. The EHR wasn't originally designed for supporting collaboration,<sup>12</sup> and it doesn't solve the challenges of clinical communication and collaboration.

Dr. Dave Levin, chief medical officer at Sansoro Health, has discussed why a single EHR platform strategy will likely fail for those trying to deploy and leverage one EHR platform to enable collaboration and communication across the continuum of care.

"There is almost always a gap between the coverage needed for clinical and operational success and the actual footprint of the EHR," Levin wrote, explaining that mergers and acquisitions, diverse clinically integrated networks, and legacy data management are the common causes of those gaps.<sup>13</sup>

Today, many hospital CIOs believe "clinical communication" heavy lifting is best suited for a dedicated, enterprise-wide communication platform that complements your hospital's investment in the EHR.

It's shortsighted to focus on an individual department's communication needs, such as scheduling and secure messaging, and then trying to patch every department's systems together. Instead, a clinical communication platform provides the level of collaboration required for today's hospitals and health systems.

The key to more efficient care team collaboration and improved patient care, is an enterprise communication platform that connects people and workflows across the organization and offers a variety of integration and interoperability options to share data and functionality with hospital systems.

## References

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## ABOUT SPOK, INC.

Spok, Inc., a wholly owned subsidiary of Spok Holdings, Inc. (NASDAQ: SPOK), headquartered in Springfield, Virginia, is proud to be a global leader in healthcare communications. We deliver clinical information to care teams when and where it matters most to improve patient outcomes. Top hospitals rely on the Spok Care Connect<sup>®</sup> platform to enhance workflows for clinicians, support administrative compliance, and provide a better experience for patients. Our customers send over 100 million messages each month through their Spok<sup>®</sup> solutions. Spok is making care collaboration easier.



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