



# EIGHT REASONS SECURE TEXTING ALONE IS NOT ENOUGH

## COLLABORATION IN HEALTHCARE REQUIRES A DIFFERENT APPROACH

Secure texting is a great initial step for hospitals to explore secure, HIPAA-compliant communications. But in order to improve workflows and care coordination to deliver care precisely when and where it's needed, hospitals need a comprehensive solution that simplifies workflows and goes far beyond texts.

Within a hospital, staff need information from dozens of programs and systems. Think about access to electronic medical records (EMRs), critical lab/radiology results, numerous patient-specific monitors, nurse call, the employee directory, building security and monitoring, and the bed management system, just to name a few. These systems and more can send information to a multitude of different devices that include smartphones, desk phones, pagers, voice badges, email systems, LED boards, tablets, and Wi-Fi phones.

While secure texting can be used in some of these applications, the communication needs of a hospital have evolved well beyond simple text messaging. Hospitals are recognizing the need for communication tools designed specifically for healthcare's complex work environment that can integrate information from a wide variety of inputs and disseminate it to any number of output systems and devices. In short, secure texting plays a vital role in hospital communications, but clinical professionals need more. They require a modern communication system to support multiple workflows—texting is only one spoke within a mature, integrated communications hub.

## WHY SHOULD YOU EXPECT MORE?

To be most effective, secure texting should be viewed as just one component of a larger, fully integrated system. A comprehensive communications platform within a hospital should support a lot more than simply encrypting text messages. Here are eight workflows where secure texting alone is not enough:

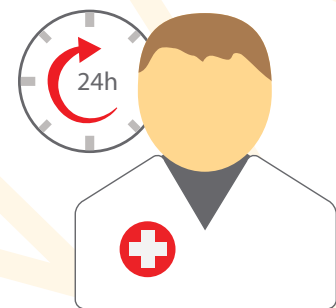
1. Finding and communicating with the right on-call provider
2. Managing patients and alarms
3. Simplifying workflows such as patient treatments from request through delivery
4. Expediting and auditing code calls
5. Speeding critical test results reporting
6. Promoting patient well-being
7. Improving handoffs and patient flow
8. Securing protected health information (PHI) and other sensitive data

## BEYOND THE TEXT: WHAT'S NEEDED

### 1 FINDING AND COMMUNICATING WITH THE RIGHT ON-CALL PROVIDER

Finding the right physician, nurse, or other care provider when a question arises can be tricky because there are shift schedules, on-call schedules, and questions about whether the recipient prefers to be reached on an office phone, smartphone, or pager. And if the provider is unavailable, who is next in line to assist?

Among hospital informatics staff, 62 percent rank on-call schedules a top pain point.<sup>1</sup> The answer is an integrated communication solution that brings together the staff directory, web-based on-call schedules, the secure texting app, intelligent escalation rules, and provider-specific information such as availability and device preference. The benefits of faster and more efficient communications will make care coordination easier for providers and safer for patients.



## 2 MANAGING PATIENTS AND ALARMS

Giving patients the ability to communicate with their nurse soon after hitting the nurse call button offers a less stressful environment for the patient. Nurses should also be able to respond quickly to patients that are unable to call for help or are unaware they need it. And nurses sometimes perform duties a nurse's aide could do, which can detract from patient care because it pulls nurses from assisting other patients who need their skills. None of these scenarios can be addressed by texting alone.

Looking at the nurse-call example, the alert could arrive as a text on a smartphone—but not all secure texting apps support this integration capability, and many nurses carry mobile devices other than a smartphone. To be flexible and adaptable to multiple workflow scenarios, texting is not enough. A robust communication system can deliver nurse call alerts directly to the appropriate nurse on multiple mobile devices. Nurses might have a Wi-Fi phone, a pager, a tablet, or a voice badge. Whichever device they use, receiving and being able to respond quickly can improve care and patient satisfaction scores. Such a system can also route requests for water, general information, or bathroom assistance to non-clinical staff to not disturb nurses unless they are required.



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Similar to supporting nurse call, being able to alert a provider when patients need assistance but cannot call for help is an important capability that secure texting apps alone may not provide. A good communication platform can enhance patient monitoring by sending system-generated alarm notifications directly to the appropriate nurse, regardless of their mobile device type, to ensure critical patient conditions are triaged quickly.

A leading patient safety organization has listed alarms as the top health technology hazard in healthcare for the past four years.<sup>2</sup> Using a clinical alerting solution to integrate a variety of patient care and monitoring systems with staff's Wi-Fi phones, smartphones, pagers, and/or voice badges speeds notification and response times. It can also promote better, safer patient care. Intelligent software can act as the first stage of triage by incorporating the facility's pre-set priority levels and using built-in logic to pass along the highest level of alerts first. Quality of care is increased by alerting nurses and other care team members quickly of a patient emergency.





## 3 SIMPLIFYING WORKFLOWS SUCH AS PATIENT TREATMENTS FROM REQUEST THROUGH DELIVERY

Physicians and nurses can waste a lot of time playing phone tag or waiting for orders to come through. Enhanced communications, including secure texts, can simplify this process.

For example, a nurse requests a nebulizer for patient treatment. Once the physician receives the communication, whether it's via phone call, email, text, or another method, he or she enters orders remotely via the computerized physician order entry (CPOE) system. A message is sent to the nurse from the EMR when the order is available. By not having to keep checking the EMR for the order, the patient can receive treatment faster.

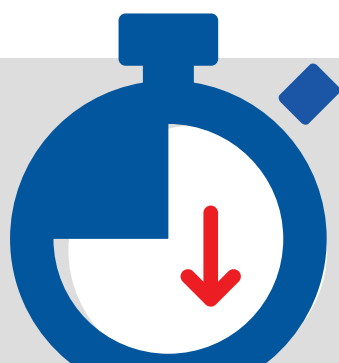
However, secure texting alone for this kind of point-to-point communication between providers can fail to do several important things. First, many texting apps don't integrate with the hospital's employee directory and on-call schedules for easy reference. Second, many secure texting apps can't support EMR integration to allow fast text notifications. And lastly, most secure texting apps by themselves do not offer the integration to provide full support for this workflow that a comprehensive communications infrastructure is designed to.

## 4 EXPEDITING AND AUDITING CODE CALLS

A minute can mean the difference between life and death, so processing codes quickly is imperative. Code calls are more complicated than just overhead announcements and can require notifying dozens, or even hundreds of people. In some cases, such as a large influx of patients following a disaster, the individuals needing to respond are not even at the hospital—and they must be alerted on whatever mobile device they carry. An efficient code call response requires that the right people are notified no matter their location or device, and that the situation is monitored and notifications can be escalated. The integrations required for this complex workflow are not supported by most secure texting applications.

And audit trails are essential in hospitals when it comes to communications. They can help a hospital retrace steps to evaluate efficiency, demonstrate compliance with guidelines from The Joint Commission, offer insight into how to improve workflows, and help reduce litigation expenses. This is particularly true during time-critical situations when knowing the time a message was sent, who received it, and the response or escalation can become crucial.

The integrated suite remains key whether you're messaging to smartphones and pagers, sending emergency notifications, or retracing who was on call. A robust communications platform provides better auditing across the organization's workflows than secure texting can offer alone.



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# 5 SPEEDING CRITICAL TEST RESULTS REPORTING

At many hospitals the reporting process for both radiology and lab test results is a manual one involving phone tag, paper documentation, and EMR documentation. This manual process can create a lot of wasted time, especially for emergency department physicians who may continually check the EMR for patient test results.

A secure text message can alert the ordering provider that a result is ready and save some of this time, but it misses the opportunity to do a lot more. In a hospital with an integrated communications platform that includes critical test results management in addition to secure texting, the reporting process can deliver results directly from the laboratory information system (LIS) and the picture archiving and communication system (PACS) to an ordering provider's mobile device. Radiologists and pathologists can report their findings and send critical results quickly using just a few button clicks on the computer. The system then launches a message and can deliver that message to a smartphone via secure text—it also has the flexibility to send to a pager or email address. The alert coming from the LIS or PACS can include detailed, actionable information if sending to an encrypted device (including encrypted pagers), and follow escalation rules for unacknowledged alerts. If the ordering provider is unavailable, the alert will pass to another clinician after a set amount of time to help ensure a critical situation is addressed quickly. And the entire process leaves a clear audit trail.

By integrating these systems with the EMR and automatically populating a patient record with test results, administrative time spent tracking dictations, maintaining a document log, copying and pasting information, and making phone calls can be significantly reduced. In addition to helping providers save time, patients will appreciate faster care. In critical situations, of course, faster care can mean better outcomes. But if results are normal and a patient can be discharged, reducing wait time and going home sooner can mean happier patients.

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## 6 PROMOTING PATIENT WELL-BEING

Overhead paging announcements and hallway conversations are likely to disturb patient sleep more than 70 percent of the time.<sup>3</sup> Reducing these sources of noise and taking greater care with patient alarm notifications can make significant improvements in the perceived quietness of the environment, promoting a more restful environment for patients and creating an overall better care experience.

Secure text messaging among staff members is a discreet form of communication because sensitive information is not being spoken and potentially overheard. This reduction in hallway conversations means less disturbance for patients in addition to better protection of the details of their cases.

Combining secure text messaging with mobile device notifications can provide a quieter environment on multiple fronts. First, by routing patient alarm notifications directly to the appropriate staff, faster response means less noise duration for the machine generating the alarm. Also, by integrating monitoring equipment alarms with staff assignment systems, nurse call notifications can go straight to the appropriate patient care provider's mobile device, reducing overhead paging because staff do not need to be tracked down.



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## 7 IMPROVING HANDOFFS AND PATIENT FLOW

There are many standard communication processes in your hospital that involve handoffs and specific actions. For example, a patient is discharged and the room needs to be turned over. A physician places STAT orders and needs the pathology results as soon as possible. A patient is waiting for transport to radiology for a scan.

These and other workflows happen continually. Your goal is to make the handoff points seamless using the right technology and mobile capabilities that extend beyond secure texts. These types of information transfers often involve HL7 data (a standardized format used to easily share information among different healthcare systems). Directing HL7 feeds being generated by clinical and information systems can make processes smoother by getting valuable data to the right people quickly. In particular, these feeds can be generated, sent, and recorded by clinical applications for EMRs, patient movement, health information systems, and critical test results.

For example, coordinating the discharge process and readying beds for use can be sped up and simplified with automated messaging to alert nursing, transport, and housekeeping—and other necessary departments, such as infection control and the pharmacy.

Secure texting may be an important component of this process, but it is merely a small piece of the larger workflow automation. With a strong communication infrastructure in place, you can capture this information and deliver new levels of efficiency in your hospital.

# 8 SECURING PROTECTED HEALTH INFORMATION (PHI) AND OTHER SENSITIVE DATA

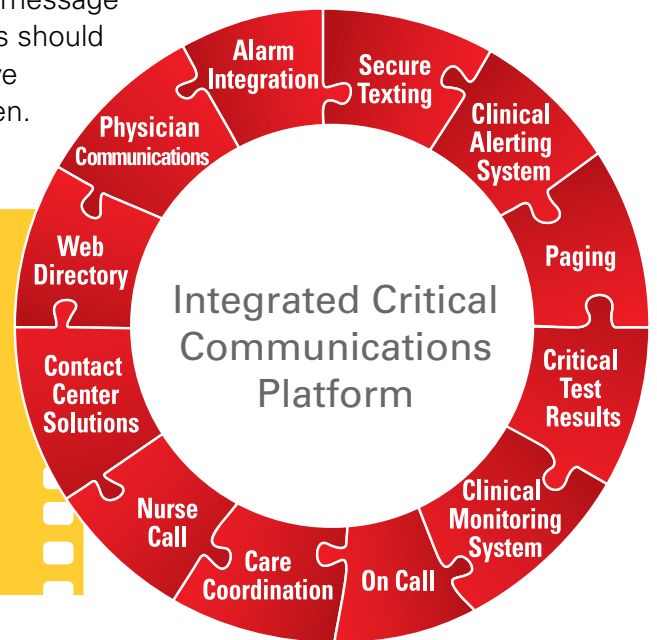
The amount of sensitive information floating around hospitals is staggering. Social Security numbers, insurance details, and of course, highly personal records about patient conditions are some of the many examples. All of this is considered protected health information that hospitals are responsible for watching over and protecting from unauthorized access at all times.

Simple SMS texting that comes standard on smartphones is not a secure form of communication when it comes to PHI, yet this method is often used in hospitals despite warnings against it. Instead, hospitals give staff an alternative in the form of a texting app that maintains the security of information sent and received. However, the value of a stand-alone secure texting app is usually limited by the contacts in any individual's contact list.

Supporting staff in their clinical workflows means allowing integrated access to the full staff directory, on-call schedules, and device preferences to reach the right people by name or role (e.g., the on-call cardiologist). Beyond these integrations and message encryption, also look for an application that offers application lock, automated message removal, and a password-protected inbox. Administrators should also be able to complete a remote device wipe to remove messages from a smartphone that has been lost or stolen.

Looking for a critical communications platform that can solve multiple challenges across different areas and departments of the hospital? This integrated solution provides directory details, on-call schedules, staff contact preferences, secure messaging, paging, and a lot more.

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## CONCLUSION

Effective communication is a central part of care delivery—communication among providers, between technology systems and caregivers, and among providers and other staff.

A unified, integrated communications infrastructure makes many of those communications more efficient, more convenient and more secure, leading to better outcomes and a better care experience overall. And when seconds count during a code or the reporting of critical test results, vital information needs to reach the right people quickly.

While secure texting plays a role in a hospital's overall communications infrastructure, it is merely one piece of a much larger picture. Giving physicians, nurses, support staff, and others the proper communication tools helps them put more focus where it belongs—helping patients get better.

## References

<sup>1</sup> Spyglass Consulting Group Health Care Study: Spok Secure Messaging Survey. September 2013

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.ecri.org/press/Pages/ECRI-Institute-Announces-Top-10-Health-Technology-Hazards-for-2015.aspx>

<sup>3</sup> Solet, J. M., Buxton, O.M., Ellenbogen, J.M., Wang, W., and Carballiera, A. (2010). Evidence-based design meets evidence-based medicine: The sound sleep study. Concord, CA: The Center for Health Design. [https://www.healthdesign.org/sites/default/files/Validating%20Acoustic%20Guidelines%20for%20HC%20Facilities\\_Sound%20Sleep%20Study.pdf](https://www.healthdesign.org/sites/default/files/Validating%20Acoustic%20Guidelines%20for%20HC%20Facilities_Sound%20Sleep%20Study.pdf)



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