



Care coordination in the smartphone era

Smartphone use has grown rapidly recently. **Colin Balmforth**, president of Spok, believes this trend can have a positive impact on hospital workflows and patient care.

Today's generation of doctors and nurses can commonly be found in hospital hallways with a buzzing smartphone on their hip or within their grasp. In fact, the UK is one of the more advanced mobile markets, with about 70% of the population using a smartphone. This increasing use of smartphone technology is beginning to transform the daily workflows of healthcare providers, but hospitals are slow to embrace the devices.

The question is: are smartphones being used in hospitals in smart ways? There is no doubt smartphones have astounding capabilities, but can they be used to help care providers work more efficiently and provide better patient care? The simple answer is: yes.

The most obvious functionality that smartphones bring to healthcare is mobile communications, including phone calls, messaging, and emails. Doctors and nurses have always been mobile. Historically, notifying these caregivers required an overhead announcement or a message to a pager. Now that we have entered the era of smartphones and tablets, these devices can be used to make caregivers aware of urgent requests for their input and changes in patient status. They facilitate well-coordinated care.

For example, if a nurse has a patient in pain, he or she must contact the doctor for another prescription. With access to the hospital's directory via intelligent software on his or her smartphone, the nurse can quickly send a message to the correct doctor right away. Additionally, if the doctor needs some clarification, he or she can easily reply to the message or directly call the nurse with the click of a button. The ability to communicate rapidly on

smartphones enables the doctors and nurses to provide better patient care.

Smartphones aren't limited to just person-to-person messaging. Telemetry alerts, patient alarms, and nurse call systems are just a few of the hospital systems that generate important information which needs to be communicated to hospital staff. Notifications from these systems can also automatically be sent to the appropriate caregiver's mobile device.

Even with the explosive growth of smartphones, there are many other types of devices being

Doctors and nurses value the quick messaging capabilities of the smartphones, but often they are sending messages containing confidential patient health information. Smartphones themselves don't have built-in security, so it is up to the hospital to ensure these mobile communications are secure and protected.

Fortunately, today's top technology solutions include a variety of security features, such as encryption of messages, application lock, automated message removal, and password-protected inboxes. Audit trails and traceability of communications are also top of mind for many hospital administrators. The ability to have an audit trail of smartphone communications protects care providers and the hospital if questions arise about the patient.

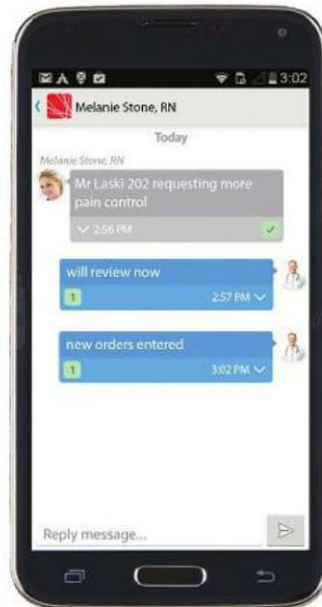
The age of smartphones has brought with it more than just basic communications. Smartphones enable quick access to electronic medical record systems, drug reference and other medical apps, on-call rosters, medical device connectivity, and even delivery of test results.

Smartphones can be a powerful tool in health-care.

Forward thinking UK hospitals are beginning to embrace smartphones and applications to improve patient care, efficiency, and safety but there is still a long road ahead.



Colin Balmforth



used in hospitals today, including tablets, pagers, wi-fi phones, voice badges, and desk phones. Many hospitals need these other mobile devices for certain roles or to ensure reliable coverage during disaster situations. This means hospitals need a single system that sends messages to the right individuals, no matter what type of device staff members may be carrying.

Perhaps the biggest challenge with smartphones in hospitals is the security of communications on the devices.

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