

Revolutionizing Patient Care Through Communications

Helping nurses improve patient outcomes, patient care productivity, and hospital profitability

Introduction

With the world's population growing and aging, the demand for the highest quality of healthcare remains strong. Yet, there continues to be a shortage of skilled nurses to address that demand, and it is projected to get worse. It is estimated that by 2025, there will be 260,000 more registered nurse (RN) positions than there are nurses to fill them.¹ Small healthcare facilities and doctors offices need to make sure they are using nurses' time wisely to take better care of patients and drive better medical outcomes.

Significant investments in diagnostics and treatment capabilities have been made in recent years by small healthcare providers, resulting in vastly improved medical outcomes and patient care processes. Additionally, investments in electronic health record (EHR) platforms and workflow systems have aimed to address regulatory compliance and increase the accuracy and availability of patient information to authorized personnel, resulting in improved efficiency.

However, given the expected shortage of nurses, providers need to address any human latency introduced throughout the patient care continuum. Communications technologies can be leveraged to improve the efficiency and productivity of nurses providing patient care, as well as how they work with each other, physicians and other staff. This allows professionals to spend more time providing "hands-on" care to patients, and less time on coordination of that care.

¹"The Recent Surge In Nurse Employment: Causes and Implications," Health Affairs, July/August 2009, <http://content.healthaffairs.org/cgi/content/abstract/hlthaff.28.4.w657>

Table of Contents

Introduction

How Nurses Spend Their Time

Using Avaya IP Office to improve patient outcomes

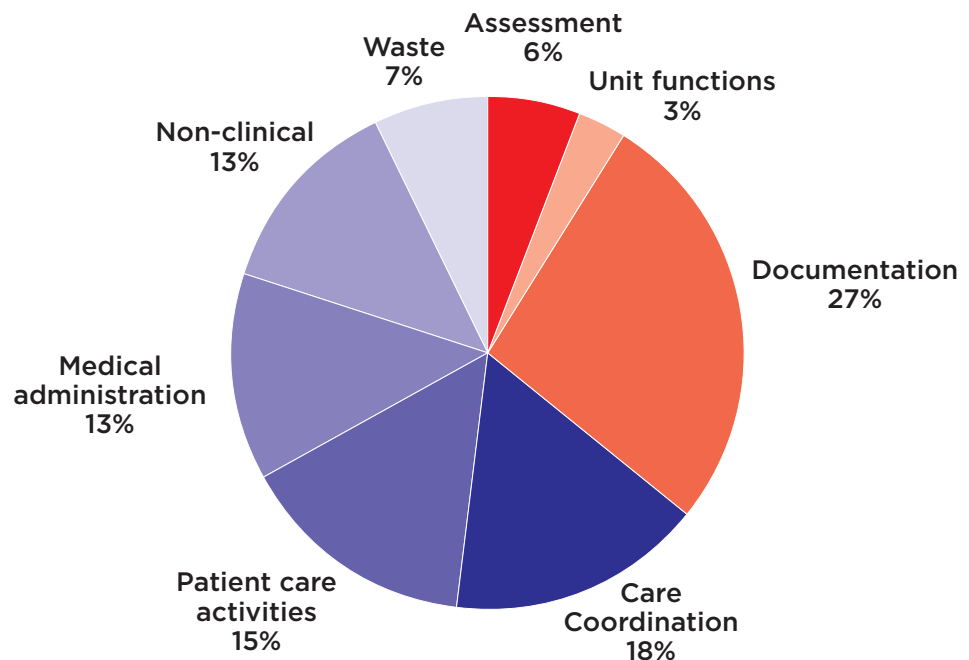
- Nurse mobility
- Patient care collaboration and communication
- Patient contact services and workflow

How communications addresses each phase of the patient care continuum

Building on current and past investments

How nurses spend their time

According to the International Journal of Nursing Studies, the majority of nurses choose their profession based on the desire to “care for others,” “help people”, and “make a difference”.² Unfortunately, many young nurses become disillusioned when faced with the realities of the profession, and roughly 37% of new RNs said they felt ready to change jobs.³ This disillusionment can be attributed to how nurses spend their time on the job (see Figure 1)—surprisingly, only 15% of a nurse’s day is spent on actual patient care.



Source – “A 36 Hospital Time and Motion Study: How Do Medical-Surgical Nurses Spend Their Time?,” The Permanente Journal, Summer 2008, Vol. 12 No.3

Figure 1 – How nurses spend their time

The typical day in the life of a nurse involves the completion of dozens of different processes that require manual intervention because they are not integrated or linked through technology. This includes managing more mundane aspects of patient care, such as making calls to drive processes, coordinating tasks and activities, dealing with patient no-shows and wrong-shows, and reworking schedules as a result. With the growing shortage of nurses, as well as increasing demand on nurses’ time, healthcare providers are looking for ways to change this dynamic.

In this challenging environment, what role is there for communications technology? Quite a big one—in fact, communications technology is a key way for healthcare providers to achieve the goals of better, more cost-effective healthcare. By streamlining procedures, automating routine functions, and supporting customer self-service capabilities, today’s communications technologies are helping healthcare providers become more responsive to patient needs, while freeing up nurses to provide quality care for patients.

²Mackintosh, C., “Caring: the socialization of pre-registration student nurses: a longitudinal qualitative descriptive study,” International Journal of Nursing Studies, 2006, 43(8), 953–962

³“Newly Licensed RNs’ Characteristics, Work Attitudes, and Intentions to Work,” American Journal of Nursing, September 2007

Using Avaya IP Office to improve patient outcomes

Avaya IP Office is a communications system designed specifically for small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs), and it provides powerful capabilities to help organizations communicate more effectively with patients, staff, or external vendors/suppliers. With a solution such as Avaya IP Office, a healthcare facility can improve nurses' experiences—and, not incidentally—patient outcomes.

The primary ways a healthcare facility can leverage the Avaya IP Office solution can be categorized by the following capabilities: nurse mobility, patient care collaboration and communication, and patient contact services and workflow.

Nurse mobility

Nurses need to be in continuous communication with patients, clinical staff and administrative personnel, and available to their patients at all times they are on duty. They are also highly mobile, often making rounds with patients across the facility.

Additionally, because nurses work in shifts and share patient responsibilities, the risk of miscommunication is high. What happens if a critical call about a patient comes through just as or just after a shift is changing? Who is responsible for routing the call to the right shift nurse? What happens if the wrong one gets paged?

A centrally managed, fit for purpose mobility solution like Avaya IP Office with Avaya 3720 or 3725 wireless telephones can help avoid miscommunication and ensure that nurses are prepared when needed. For example, a patient needing a nurse will push a call button to the nurse's station. The attendant at the station attempts to call or page the nurse on duty. Often, there is a delay if the attendant has to track down the right nurse. By implementing a mobility solution, where nurses can get paged while roaming the facility, patient satisfaction is increased.

Even better, patients can be automatically connected to their on-duty nurse by routing calls directly to the nurse's mobile handset. By eliminating the middle person—the nurse station attendant—patient calls get answered sooner and nothing falls through the cracks.

Using a mobile solution is easier on nurses, too, since they only need to log on at the beginning of their shift. From then on, all calls can be routed directly to their predetermined phone numbers. It enables nurses and other facility staff to improve clinical communications by reaching the right person at the right time virtually anywhere within the property. It also reduces administrative work so more time can be spent caring for patients.

Other benefits of this solution include:

- Improved nurse availability for direct patient care—up to 60 minutes per shift
- Increased patient flow because of enhanced nurse mobility and communications
- Decreased staff turnover through stress reduction and increased mobility
- Reduced patient wait time and increased patient satisfaction and referral rates

Patient care collaboration and communication

Nurses need to constantly collaborate while on the job—with each other, as well as with other facility staff. In addition to staying connected with their patients, nurses may need to be in close contact with physicians, housekeeping, medical technicians or emergency personnel. They also need to be able to locate supplies or equipment, such as medications, wound dressings and wheelchairs. On average, nurses walk up to five miles per day and spend 60 minutes per shift looking for or waiting for equipment—time that they should be spending with patients.

With Avaya IP Office, doctors and other clinical staff can be located and communicated with via instant message and “presence” capabilities, so nurses know if a contact is available, busy, or even away. If a doctor is moving to or between rooms in an office or hospital, important messages or faxes can be delivered to their smart phones via email and played or viewed simply by clicking the attachment. For an even greater level of collaboration, voice conference calls or small multi-party videoconferences can be instantly set up, whether staff is on site or located at a remote office or area of the facility.

To ensure patient safety, healthcare facilities must have clean, disinfected rooms to minimize the transmission of contagions. With the rise of “superbugs” like MRSA, it’s vital that the housekeeping status of each room is timely and accurate—nurses need to know if a particular room is clean, dirty, or requires a specific service not yet completed. With a communications system, housekeeping can enter codes right through a mobile handset to indicate the status of the room, informing an admitting nurse without delay or requiring a visual inspection of the room.

Some patients on extended stay may need health check calls or daily reminders while at a healthcare facility. The communications system can be programmed to generate automatic calls to resident telephones at specific times of day, and play a pre-recorded greeting created by the staff. If for any reason, that call goes unanswered after a specific number of retries, the system will generate an alarm in the event immediate assistance is required.

By embedding these collaboration capabilities into existing workflows, hospitals can help nurses and other staff be more efficient and accessible and, in the process, provide better patient care. Leveraging your existing infrastructure and clinical systems, these solutions enable:

- Faster access to knowledgeable and available clinical staff
- Quick retrieval of key patient data to help nurses and other clinical staff act faster
- Improved collaboration and scheduling capabilities, both with clinical staff and medical equipment

Patient contact services and workflow

Admitting patients efficiently, accurately and quickly is mission-critical to healthcare facilities—whether a hospital, clinic, or a doctor’s office. Numerous phone calls between patients, admitting physicians, floor nurses, administration or housekeeping can delay admissions or cause patient no-shows or wrong-shows. To illustrate the impact of patient no-shows, on the average, missed or cancelled appointments cost the average U.S. hospital over \$1.2M in lost revenue.⁴ Many times, simple miscommunication and busy schedules are the root cause of these oversights.

Similarly, nurses often spend 90 minutes or longer making all the phone calls necessary to complete each patient discharge. Added time is spent on routine or post-discharge follow-up calls, many of which don’t require direct nurse contact.

The solution: communications technologies that automate patient appointments and post-discharge calls. An automated notification application can deliver appointment information to patients by phone, e-mail, or even SMS text message. The system should be flexible enough to deliver pre-test/procedure or pre-surgical instructions, special directives, or a customized message for virtually any purpose. Patients who might have forgotten a scheduled appointment have the option to confirm or re-schedule, minimizing the chance of a no-show. The system should also permit a configurable number of retries in the event of no answer or busy signal, and log the status for reporting purposes and management.

Similarly, automated communications with discharged patients for routine follow-up can help improve patient compliance with post-discharge care instructions, rehabilitation procedures and medications. It also allows nurses to spend much more time with those patients who really do need help—typically a small percentage of discharged patients.

Potential benefits of these types of pre-admission, discharge and post-discharge communications solutions can include:

- Reducing no-shows by 20%, improving patient flow and minimizing lost service revenue
- Increasing new revenue through proactive calling and rescheduling
- Automating communications with discharged patients to improve patient compliance and satisfaction

⁴Based on multiple external studies and internal Avaya analysis

How communications addresses each phase of the patient care continuum

Not all procedures are performed on an outpatient basis, which is why patients admitted to healthcare facilities require skilled nursing care. From a nursing perspective, the patient care continuum consists of four stages that can be enhanced with collaborative communications tools: pre-admission, patient flow, patient care and post-discharge (Figure 2).

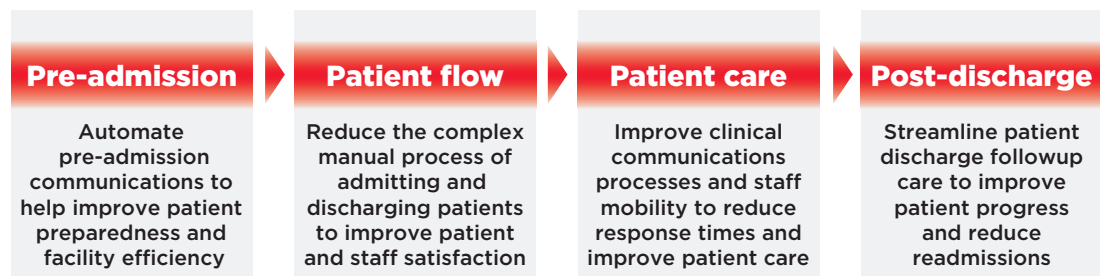


Figure 2 – The Patient Care Continuum

Pre-admission - This first stage of the patient care continuum is when healthcare providers reach out to patients with health information and appointment reminders. The chief driver of this activity is the high cost of missed appointments. Automation is a critical enabler of this stage, as manually calling patients with reminders is a costly and inefficient use of skilled clinical resources.

Patient flow - This involves admitting patients into a facility before a procedure or a consult is performed, and discharging them after their visit is complete and the patient is deemed safe to leave. Among the challenges the nursing staff faces during this stage are long wait times that can destroy patient satisfaction. Patients may choose to go to—or will be diverted to—other medical facilities if their admittance is delayed. Additionally, if patients are not discharged in a timely manner, bed turnover rates decline and hospital revenues suffer. Finally, the discharge process requires a considerable amount of coordination by the clinical staff, usually performed by telephone. As in the pre-admission stage, this phone work typically doesn't represent optimal use of nurses' time.

Patient care - This stage involves all actions taken by the nursing staff to deliver the highest quality care to patients. In this stage, nurses are under pressure to increase the number of patients being seen at the hospital through accelerating bed turnover rates, to successfully coordinate the dispersed staff and medical equipment needed to provide the care, and to transcend the often inefficient communications systems that delay timely transfer of critical information.

Post-discharge care - This final stage of the patient care continuum involves proactively contacting patients to improve their compliance with post-discharge instructions and care. Nurses are under pressure to do this well because of the high cost of patient re-admissions. For example, in the United States, Medicare and Medicaid re-admissions within 30 days of discharge will not be reimbursable to the hospital.

Building on current and past investments

The good news is that hospitals don't need to reinvent the wheel to have these types of capabilities. Leading communications solutions should complement, not replace, your existing systems and processes. Here are three steps to getting started:

Prioritize your needs - Assess areas in which your nursing team is struggling most. Is it related to mobility? Collaboration? Patient workflow? All three? Many issues will be obvious to chief nursing officers, but others may require additional analysis. By identifying specifically where your challenges exist, you can decide which collaboration tools and processes are most likely to work best and provide the most effective ROI.

Find a vendor that understands the healthcare market and offers you complete solutions, not just point products - Technical competence is certainly important—today's unified communications and collaboration tools are sophisticated and powerful technology. At the same time, you need someone who understands the healthcare industry and the challenges within a provider's environment. The vendor you choose should demonstrate a willingness to address all aspects of the solution, including problem identification, solution design, business case development, performance measurement, deployment strategy and road map development, and solution implementation and maintenance.

Take measured steps to implement a solution - A leading practice for businesses that deploy unified communications and collaboration capabilities is taking measured steps. The deployment strategy and road map should identify areas of "low-hanging fruit" in which collaboration solutions can have the greatest and fastest impact, thus paving the way for longer-term capabilities. Such an approach can help you show results faster—to your board and patients alike—and, through accelerated ROI, potentially fund later phases through improved revenue streams and more effective cost management.

About Avaya

Avaya is a global leader in business communications systems. The company provides unified communications, contact centers, data solutions and related services directly and through its channel partners to leading businesses and organizations around the world. Enterprises of all sizes depend on Avaya for state-of-the-art communications that improve efficiency, collaboration, customer service and competitiveness. For more information please visit www.avaya.com.

The Avaya logo consists of the word "AVAYA" in a bold, red, sans-serif font. The letters are closely spaced and have a slight shadow effect.

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