How healthcare organisations can achieve operational efficiency and improve patient care

Healthcare is quickly moving outside of the four walls of facilities. Individualisation, patient-centricity, seamless continuum of care from the home to the doctor's office to the hospital ward and aftercare, means that traditional healthcare delivery methods are no longer meeting patient demands.

Patients are now playing a larger role in their own care through a variety of technical means. For example: direct appointment scheduling; reviewing their own clinical results; communicating with care providers through smart devices; and proactive monitoring with medical devices that predict problems and provide patient guidance.

Paul Craven, Health Practice lead, Wavelink, said, "To cope with these changes, and be able to offer improved patient care and operational efficiency, healthcare organisations are becoming more digital. However, a successful digital strategy requires technology infrastructure to support it. Organisations also need to ensure they are managing their risk profile by securing patient privacy and remaining compliant. In an era when individuals are accountable for board and executive management decisions, it's important that management has a better grasp on day-to-day risk mitigation, and technology plays a big part in that."

Convenience is one of the most underrated opportunities for healthcare organisations. Giving staff access to the people, equipment, and information they need when they need it saves time, reduces angst, and improves employee satisfaction and therefore mindset, which ultimately results in a more positive patient experience.

Paul Craven said, "Witnessing the frustration of a staff member who can't find something or someone is not a positive care experience. Also, making more use of automation for the allocation and management of common tasks frees carers to do what only they can do; engage with patients and providers."

The use of technology can also put the patient at the centre of their own care, which meets the goal of becoming more patient-centric but requires a lot of infrastructure to facilitate. To enable a true patient-centric experience, healthcare providers need to know where staff are, provide them with a mobile device, use healthcare mobile apps and handsets designed for healthcare, and have the Wi-Fi infrastructure and software to make sure these all work together.

According to Paul Craven, "As medical equipment and other devices get smaller and more efficient, it becomes more critical for software to play a key role where hardware has historically been the centrepiece of traditional workflows. Take a simple example like Nurse Call. In addition to the traditional button on the wall or bed, Nurse Call could be a number of menu items on a smartphone, tablet or patient entertainment system application. This would be more informative about what a patient actually needs such as urgent attention, medication, a meal, or another pillow, and a response could be directly communicated including sending the right person for that particular task. This reduces unnecessary load on trained clinicians in peak times."

This really becomes powerful when it is integrated with patient monitoring, which can alert nurses and physicians to take specific action from a particular data output. This might include, for example, testing blood sugar levels and ordering insulin automatically based on the resulting levels. Add to this location services for healthcare professionals and asset tagging for equipment, and staff can easily know who is closest to the patient to assist, and where the nearest required equipment is located.

Going from paper to automation in a high-pressure environment like healthcare can be overwhelming.

Healthcare organisations looking to take the leap to digital should start simple, creating a technical ecosystem that can grow over time as things evolve. Focus on key priorities like: how to keep patients and staff safe and secure; how to effectively know what state patients are in and who should do what, next; how to communicate relevant information quickly to all necessary parties; and how to keep track of everything that needs to be done, as well as know who actually did what, when.

From there, making decisions on technology like wireless; integrated communications platforms; location services; alerting and alarming services; tagged equipment; and smart portable and mobile devices will be easier.

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