

How do you support an electronic medical record after go live is over?

by Trish Gallagher, RN, Cerner Practice Director



Well the system is built, the official go live is over and now it is time to move on to the next project. You have 500+ nurses doing electronic documentation and 400+ physicians trying to enter their own orders. That is in addition to the pharmacists, radiologists, laboratory staff and other ancillary staff who are interacting and relying on an electronic chart every day now. The old help desk was able to assist most users calling in with broken hardware and maybe a password reset, but even then time was not as critical since the patient still had a paper chart and documentation was still being done on paper. But now what do you do when a new agency nurse shows up or at 3 am, the nurse has a question about documenting PCA's and no one on the floor knows the answer.... Or the MD is trying to admit a patient and is having difficulty with his orders. The organization must be prepared to answer questions 24 x 7 in order to support the direct care providers.

Process vs. System

Learning how to use most electronic clinical documentation system is not that complicated. The concept of charting and signing is not new to clinicians however the shift to discrete data elements from free text is new and makes 'figuring new processes' out a little tougher. The person at the other end of the phone needs to be able to assist that clinician with the entire process. For example, the individual should understand the entire Medication Administration process in order to assist clinicians with CareMobile. Although hardware issues may be encountered, often the questions are centered around issues with the eMAR, clinical data associated with medication administration and the process of cosigning or witnessing which are all based on policies and procedures of the organization. The documentation associated with administering a blood transfusion may require specific steps in order to ensure policy is being adhered to for the blood bank as well as nursing.

Now Is Not Soon Enough

With a shortage of healthcare workers and an increased acuity level of patients today, the implementation of an electronic medical record is intended to streamline and improve the efficiency of processes. But when the system delays care or complicates the care provider's ability to provide care, it is no longer providing the safety and efficiency outcomes. We all know that when we need the answer NOW, we will often figure something out that will work 'for now'. Clinicians need answers timely in order to continue to provide patient care. That is why having a reliable, efficient individual on the end of the phone who understands the demands of the clinician, the processes involved, the system capabilities and the patients' needs will allow your organization to provide a customer service oriented support model to your clinicians. This will also assist with system adoption since answers are available real time from a knowledgeable expert. They want help NOW and not a call back in 20 - 30 minutes - by that time I have moved on to 10 other things.

Customer Service

"If Disney Ran Your Hospital 91/2 Things You Would Do Differently" by Fred Lee is a perfect example of the newest gold standard in ensuring the patient experience results in satisfied patients who return for care. With the public becoming more informed and the idea of patients being able to research a hospital's vital data, customer service is at the forefront of everything we do. A successful support desk will provide that same level of service to our clinicians. It is also important that the data associated with providing that service is measured in the form of customer satisfaction, response rates and call volume in order to continuously improve that service just as we do patient care. Like any customer service program, we should measure baseline data, determine what our clinicians need in a help desk and then constantly strive to improve it.

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Recommended Practices

A technical help desk will always be required but the question becomes – should this be the first line of call or the second line of call once the EMR is live? Although an organization will need to determine which process works best, some of the following have been successful in providing ongoing support to digital hospitals:

- Develop Customer Service Informatics Specialist positions. These individuals generally have some type of clinical background (Unit Clerks; Patient Care Techs; Pharmacy Techs etc) and provide a great front line for support. Of course, attitude and customer service skills are just as important as the clinical experience. This will likely be a brand new position for your organization and it may take some selling to get it approved.
- The Informatics Specialist is very customer service oriented and may be the first individual to take the call (this may be only during peak hours or all the time depending on the volume of calls and the depth of the electronic functionality).
- The Informatics Specialist can also be a key individual when system changes are made and upgrades occur. In fact, they can be key in communicating out common mistakes (opportunities for education) and doing inservice programs with staff/units. This can dramatic improve compliance with documentation standards and system adoption.
- Password resets must happen immediately – clinicians cannot wait for a password reset... this often results in sharing usernames in order to get the work done. Consideration of a self help password reset utility may also have some great benefits.
- Make sure you have a process to cover float nurses, agency staff and students which everyone on the help desk understands.
- Regardless of who answers the phone, ensure the handoff to the accountable person is seamless to the clinician and is handled timely according to the severity of the call.
- Circle back around... make sure the issue is resolved to the end users satisfaction and close the loop!
- One number for all issues – don't ask your users to call one number for technical issues and another for process – they won't remember. Keep it Simple for them.
- Process, Process, Process ... just as processes are of the utmost importance to the new system in use, they are also important to support the system. Ensure customer satisfaction is superior with issues prioritized and resolved according to Service Level Agreements and then improve it continuously!

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