



Solution Provider Academy

Documenting Communication to Improve Patient Satisfaction

Highlights

Profile

- Texas Health Resources
- 14 Hospitals & 2981 Beds
- \$2.38 billion net patient revenue

Challenges

- Patient complaints often led to “he said/she said” disagreements
- Texas Health did not have a method to identify the root cause of patient complaints and educate staff on effective communication procedures
- After centralizing its patient access intake center, Texas Health needed an effective method for managing patient communications

Solution

- Texas Health implemented a software communication management solution that records and indexes communications between hospital staff and patients
- In addition to recording phone calls, Texas Health implemented the system to record face-to-face conversations with patients

Results

- Texas Health has been able to use recordings in conjunction with patient satisfaction surveys to improve the entire patient experience
- If a patient has a complaint, Texas Health can review the entire encounter and identify the exact cause of the complaint
- Texas Health can also use the recording to educate staff members regarding opportunities to improve their communication procedures

Patient satisfaction has been a concern for many health care leaders over the last decade, and with satisfaction scores now representing a portion of an organization’s value-based reimbursement, it has become an even greater focus. As a result, many organizations are looking to improve processes that have the potential to impact patient satisfaction.

Patient access functions represent one area for improvement as a significant amount of patient contact occurs during these front-end processes. For example, Academy research indicates that 29% of the organizations surveyed have a centralized “scheduling” process to collect comprehensive patient information in a single call, eliminating redundancies that may occur with separate scheduling and pre-registration calls.

To effectively manage patient communications, and thus increase patient satisfaction, some organizations have implemented solutions that record conversations between staff and patients. To learn more about the process of recording communications and the potential benefits, The Academy recently spoke with Patti Consolver, the Director of Patient Access and Strategic Revenue Services for Texas Health Resources—a health system with 14 wholly-owned hospitals.

Challenges

Texas Health has had a system in place to record phone conversations between staff and payers since the early 2000s. When payers deny claims, this allows the health system to respond with documentation that proves the organization followed appropriate procedures.

After centralizing its patient access intake center approximately five years ago, Texas Health recognized that it needed a similar solution to record patient communications. “There were questions coming out: did you tell the patient this? Was this explained to the patient?” Consolver says. “There was a lot of he said/she said going on.”

After identifying an opportunity to improve the patient experience, Texas Health’s biggest challenge was training its staff to positively impact patient satisfaction. The health system did not have an effective method for identifying the actual cause of patient complaints, meaning leadership was unable to effectively train staff to fix the underlying issues with their communication procedures. “Patients would come in [with their perception] and say what happened, and nine times out of ten we would go back to the employee and the story was a little different or we really couldn’t help educate the employee on how they could have said something differently to enhance the patient’s experience,” Consolver adds.

Solution

With the success Texas Health had recording payer conversations to overturn denials, the healthcare organization decided to expand the voice recording system into its scheduling and pre-registration departments approximately four years ago. “We now record at the point of pre-registration so as issues come up, if a patient says ‘well they didn’t tell me to pay at the time I came in,’ we can actually pull that call and show what happened,” Consolver explains.

Originally, Texas Health had multiple recording systems in place at different hospitals within the health system, but Consolver notes that this was difficult to manage. “We had one group of hospitals go with one system and another group go with another system and

we had [another system] on top of it all, so it seemed to muddy the waters," she says. "I think going with one system in place and identifying what that system was going to provide us, that was a bigger bang for us. Once we got all the extra people out of it we were able to focus on that system and move forward."

When recording patient communications during scheduling and pre-registration calls proved successful, early in 2012 the health system decided to expand the concept and record face-to-face conversations with patients in registration areas. "We are really able to do a lot more with that because we are able to listen to the whole experience and minimize the steps involved," Consolver says. Now, if a patient complaint makes it up to the administrative level, the patient's entire experience can be replayed for the hospital president or compliance department.

According to Consolver, the process to record a conversation is relatively easy for the end user. For both phone calls and face-to-face conversations, the staff member simply needs to hit a function key on his or her computer's keyboard to begin the recording. From there, the system records the conversation via the phone or the microphone on the computer if it is a face-to-face encounter. Every recording is then indexed, providing an audit trail for Texas Health if there is ever an issue with the encounter. To record registration conversations in the ED, Texas Health also implemented the system on its workstation-on-wheels computers.

Results

By recording patient communications, Texas Health has been able to improve the patient experience from the first encounter through admissions. Recently, the health system has added questions to its patient satisfaction surveys related to the following issues specific to the registration process:

- Asked for the same information—address, phone number, etc.—multiple times
- Told the wrong location for a procedure
- Given inaccurate instructions
- Told a different co-pay during different conversations

If a patient satisfaction survey has low responses related to these topics, Texas Health can then pull the recording of the calls to identify the root cause of the problem.

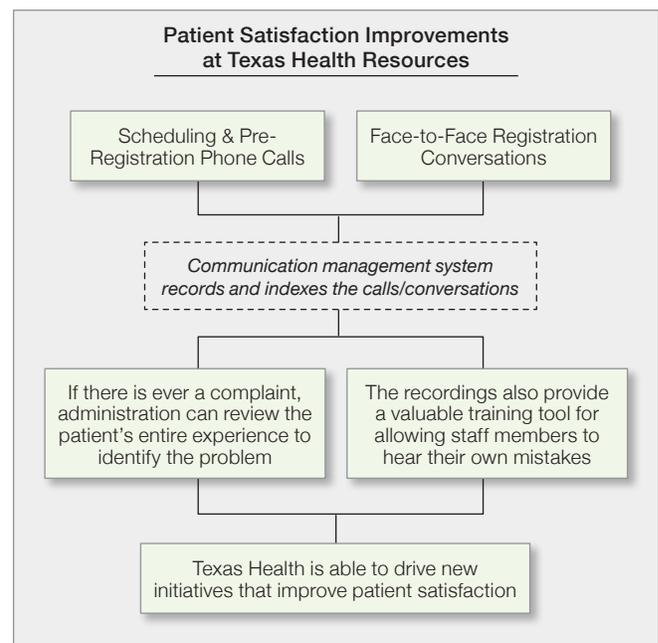
In addition, Texas Health can use the recordings to identify trends in its patient communications. For example, an admission conversation should be shorter for a patient that has been pre-registered compared to the admissions conversation for a walk-in patient. However, if the recordings are similar in length for a particular department, it shows that the organization is spending valuable resources on gathering redundant information during the pre-registration call and the face-to-face registration.

These recordings have also helped Texas Health significantly improve its internal training process for patient communications.

"If a patient comes in and complains about the registration call, we can go in and listen to confirm, then use that as an opportunity to provide one-on-one education for that employee," Consolver explains. Staff members have appreciated this ability to listen to their calls and actually hear some of the mistakes they were making. "It's been a really good communication tool as far as learning from what they did or how they portrayed themselves," Consolver adds.

Going forward, Texas Health is using its voice recording solution to help identify process improvements throughout the health system's patient access departments and ultimately improve the entire patient experience. During a recent patient access retreat, leaders from each of the health system's 14 hospitals were asked to develop a pilot project to test and monitor the effects on patient satisfaction. To help facilitate the development of the pilot projects, Texas Health played the recordings of a mammography patient's experience that totaled 19 minutes and included three separate requests for the patient's address. "We had a hospital come back and say, 'We are going to stop pre-registering mammogram patients; we are just going to take what is gathered at scheduling and post that account and when that patient comes in, register it so that patient doesn't have to have the preregistration call. Then let's see if that impacts patient satisfaction,'" Consolver explains.

According to Consolver the overall benefits of recording the patient communications are apparent across the health system. "We are so much better positioned to educate the staff, educate everyone to find out what we could be doing differently with that patient interaction," she says. "It allows us to manage our staff and manage the patient experience a lot better." +



About the Communication Management Solution

To learn more about the details of the communication management system discussed in this case study, you can contact the Solution Provider Academy at [888-238-2448](tel:888-238-2448) or spa@hbinsights.com