How to choose clinical communication tools

Communication plays a big role in human interaction. In healthcare, effective communication between care providers, and with their patients, is a must. This is because **poor communication can adversely impact patient care** or even cause medical errors.

The advent of multi-use smartphones and mobile devices, including **mobile apps and portals,** has afforded doctors and medical staff an easy and fast way to communicate with each other and to connect with patients. For healthcare organisations, it is important to choose the right communication tool and optimise its use for improved patient care.

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Three experts offer these best practice advice and knowledgeable tips for healthcare CIOs tasked with implementing communications technology. These recommendations are also useful for those organisations with communications technology already up and running.

Assessing your facility's clinical needs

You are not buying a clinical communication tool simply because this is what many other organisations are using. What you need is a technology that meets your facility's unique needs. To help you with a comprehensive assessment of these needs, **get the input and buy-in of the entire organisation,** especially those on the front lines, says Paul Coyne, RN, senior director, clinical informatics and advanced practice nursing at the Hospital for Special Surgery in New York City.

As workflow differs from one department to department, it is imperative to perform these collaborative assessments for each individual unit, according to John Elms, CEO of Critical Alert Systems. Engaging the clinicians and medical staff should help "to ensure that their needs and the needs of the patients will be met with the new technology being considered," he points out.

Evaluating the product

After establishing an understanding of the organisation's needs, the next step is **product evaluation.** Here, a list of "must-haves," "nice to haves" and "can't haves" comes in handy. With these parameters identified, the buyer/evaluation committee "should engage in a rigorous assessment of what the vendors have to offer and, in doing so, make no allowances for compromise," Elms advises.

Once you've narrowed it down to two or three systems, ask the **vendors involved to set up demo systems** of their communication technologies to allow organisation staff to work with it in a simulated but realistic setting. As Elms points out, "a thorough evaluation of the solutions will help ensure that the implementation you choose will be successful and well-received by clinical users."

Mobile maturity

The organisation needs to **assess its mobile maturity status** before making a clinical communications investment, according to Douglas Brown,

president and managing partner at [Black Book Research.](#) With the industry application development frenzy starting in 2014, he notes, healthcare providers have operated in response mode from the rapid fragmentation of workflows caused by single purpose apps. Such fragmentation has created significant infrastructure, application maintenance and user satisfaction issues.

The industry is shifting to clinical communication platforms that encompass more simple, secured messaging, and some vendors are making advancements towards delivering a united app solution, Brown points out. His advice is for **provider organisations to collaborate with teams** on creating a strategy map to achieve the highest level of mobile technology adoption success especially in the context of clinical communications and messaging investments.

Establish ROI goals

Another best practice is to **set ROI goals prior to implementation** , according to Brown. In the Q3 2018 Black Book survey study of clinical communications adoption, he notes that only 9 percent of healthcare IT managers (10 of 110) reported establishing a means to measure wins and improvements through the implementation. "Without a way to demonstrate noteworthy return on investment over status quo, they lacked the advancements in patient outcomes and mission-supporting achievements," Brown explains.

He says the ROI of secure clinical communications platforms depends on their ability to interface and integrate with other healthcare systems. Robust interfacing and intuitive application user flows are what drive platform usage among clinicians and staff, Brown says, adding that the CIO needs to **[develop meaningful metrics](#)** to show that the communication platform is encouraging healthcare delivery improvements and cost savings.

Barriers to optimal communication

Coyne's advice: "Don't simply ask your frontline staff what new tools they need – ask them what they believe are the barriers to optimal communication. Then, implement tools that break down those barriers."

The primary job of clinical staff is not to check messages, but rather to care for patients, Coyne stresses. Multiple communication channels – i.e., phone, email, text and EHR messaging – can be overwhelming, and when you're experiencing communication overload, messages can often be missed, he explains. To **avoid creating a barrage of messages from different platforms, rules** may need to be created on discontinuing use of old methods of communication, or designating which specific tools can be used as preferred mediums for certain types of messages.

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