Trends Driving Healthcare Collaboration

Why Connecting Clinicians is Critical

Physicians, hospitals, and health systems are riding a wave of policy turmoil, consumer empowerment, and tightening margins. Healthcare providers are facing increasing financial, market, and regulatory pressure to improve management of chronic care diseases, eliminate unnecessary costs, adhere to evidence-based medical guidelines, and deliver high quality, patient-centered care. In this environment, strengthening collaborative care, especially for patients with chronic diseases, has become a priority for policymakers and the medical community.

Healthcare providers are teaming up to provide coordinated and seamless patient care that reduces medical errors and improves healthcare quality while lowering costs by avoiding unnecessary duplication of services. The best way for organizations to succeed, both in delivering better care and spending healthcare dollars more wisely, is using collaboration technology. Modern collaboration systems are the key to connecting and aligning clinical teams, organizations, and provider networks.

Collaboration technology enables healthcare providers to work together on challenging cases, share knowledge and best practices, and build an educational library of medical information. Collaboration platforms create an ideal environment for communities of practice and virtual gatherings dedicated to various conditions, specialties, and medical innovations.

In this white paper we'll look at some of the major trends shaping healthcare collaboration and technology.

Care coordination and patient engagement

Healthcare providers will expand their adoption and use of collaboration technology to improve care coordination and patient engagement. Increasingly, the market is weeding out those products that are collaborative in name only, while rewarding those companies that are able to deliver clear value.

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This trend will lay the foundation and deliver the tools for partnerships among physicians and between physicians and patients in their journey through the healthcare system. It will expand physicians' access to knowledge and shared understanding, and provide more opportunities for clinicians to interact with patients. Collaboration platforms create a forum for each provider wherein physicians can log in and submit a case for peer-to-peer consultation, ask questions of other physicians and conduct training courses for medical students.

Healthcare consumerization and mobile health

Fueled by innovation, the combination of healthcare consumerization and mobile health (mHealth) is creating new approaches to healthcare delivery, bringing video consultations, diagnostic tools, and telemedicine to the hands of millions of Americans, radically changing consumer experiences, and introducing new ways of reaching the patient.

The right video, voice, and content collaboration solutions can meet both clinical and nonclinical needs within a health organization. They can improve communications across the entire healthcare delivery system by connecting clinicians, administrators, and patients in a more personal and cost-effective manner. Collaborative mobile technologies can also support internal communications needs. This opens the door for more hospital employees to receive live professional training from any part of the world. Clinicians and administrators alike can provide timely and clear updates to their teams from afar.

As a result, healthcare is moving from offices and hospitals into the palms of consumers, helping drive down the cost of care. Mobile devices will also link together industries that rarely interact with healthcare, such as retail and financial services. While healthcare systems are planning their long-term capital investments in virtual medicine, they will need help with managing utilization of their current assets, connecting fragmented healthcare providers, and managing their exponentially growing databases. Medical staff and employees will also want to stay professionally connected, exchanging best practices and gaining expertise, collaborating, and communicating in the social, mobile, analytics, and cloud world.

Mergers, acquisitions and consolidations

Mergers, acquisitions, and consolidations among payers and providers will continue at a fairly rapid pace. It has become increasingly clear that rural and independent hospitals will have a very hard time surviving on their own in the future, and more and more of them are aligning with bigger systems. On the other hand, bigger systems

are eagerly searching for hospitals that can expand their market reach, and M&A activity across the industry shows no sign of slowing down.

The success of mergers and acquisitions will continue to depend on well-executed integration. A big part of that process is bringing together the employees of formerly separate organizations, and there is no better way to do that than to adopt and use a common collaboration and communication platform during and after the merger.

At the heart of these mergers are people: administrators, staff and physicians who need to share information and best practices to successfully implement and adapt to the sweeping changes.

Collaboration platforms that include intranet capabilities are especially helpful in M&A situations. A combined collaboration and intranet solution can be a powerful catalyst for organizational integration. It provides one place where people can come together to get company news and guidance; get to know each other; forge a common culture; and learn how to mesh practices and processes.

Consolidation efforts are very complicated in healthcare and often slow to come together, and not all mergers and acquisitions meet the approval of anti-trust regulators. So some health systems will choose clinical coordination and organizational collaboration without consolidation. Those populations will be looking for alternatives to mergers through the use of collaboration platforms to knit together cooperative networks.

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Cybersecurity

Cybersecurity is becoming a major issue, pressing healthcare providers to take preemptive action, secure medical information systems, and avert breaches that could cripple the industry. The consequences of a hacked

collaboration platform, for example, can be devastating, allowing unauthorized access to networks of hospitals and other healthcare providers, as well as theft or misuse of clinically protected or commercially valuable research data. Cybersecurity breaches are becoming more common and costly, and the healthcare industry needs to upgrade its medical information systems and prevent breaches that could impact the industry financially. A 2017 survey by Accenture found that one-quarter of American consumers have had their healthcare data stolen (Accenture, 2017).

A plethora of best practices could be borrowed from the financial industry, for example, which offers effective methods of risk mitigation applicable to healthcare: creating secure data submission protocols, designing security into each product and process, developing limits on device connectivity, etc.

Value-based models

As healthcare payments and reimbursement shift to value-based models, health systems are pursuing lower-cost care settings more aggressively and creatively than before.

Many providers and healthcare systems are developing community extension strategies as pressure on profit and revenue margins necessitates a move away from costly inpatient care. In light of this, providers are considering partnerships and integration networks with retail clinics to provide a less capital-intensive option for moving patients to outpatient settings. Integration of providers and retail clinics creates an opportunity for healthcare information technology companies to provide system integration solutions and connect all the stakeholders through collaboration technology.

Collaboration technology can also enable health insurance payers to improve collaboration with providers, and help clinicians and administrators better navigate the complicated landscape of healthcare reimbursement. Providers and payers will be able to collaborate to determine the best processes, train

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employees, manage and exchange documentation, and securely communicate about the transition to value-based models.

Big data and analytics

In the last couple of years, the drive for big data and analytics (BD&A) investment in healthcare has been somewhat dampened by the challenge of converting large data sets into something usable. Only a few providers have been able to integrate health data sets into their electronic health record systems (EHRs) and achieve good returns on such investment. For example, according to a survey conducted by ONC's eHealth Initiative, only 17% of healthcare providers have been able to integrate population health analytics into their EHR systems.

Providers have made significant investments in EHRs and may be hesitant to spend more on technology without reaping the full benefits of their initial investment. This indicates that in the near future BD&A will include more flexible data modeling and a range of new analytical techniques and algorithms designed to increase the value of existing technology by extracting new insights from the available data. This includes not only data from electronic health records, but also data gathered through peer-to-peer collaboration that can help healthcare organizations unlock the collective intelligence of physician "learning networks" that drive knowledge and discovery. With the help of such "intelligent" algorithms, such data will be delivered to the fingertips of physicians to help them make data-driven decisions for patient care in real time.

Better collaboration is paramount

All of these trends are driving the need for faster, better ways of connecting clinicians, payers, and patients securely. Collaboration can transform healthcare delivery and address inefficiencies in workflow management, chronic disease management, and treatment compliance.

New care and reimbursement models will demand that health insurers, clinicians, and their organizations collaborate and share information more regularly, and partnerships, networks, and alliances will be essential to realizing cost-effective, high quality, and sustainable care.

As hospitals and healthcare organizations struggle to address growing volumes of patients, reduce per capita costs, and improve the patient experience, collaboration will become essential for sustainability and effectiveness.

In response to all of these trends, doctors, nurses, and other clinicians will learn to work together in new, more effective ways. Fueled by alternative payment models, technological advances and powerful new database and collaboration tools, healthcare will take the first steps toward a major transformation of the payer-provider-patient dynamic.

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Find out how modern collaboration solutions can simplify clinicians' lives and improve care delivery.

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