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Streamlining Lean Management and Data Quality to Save Hospital Costs with Mobile IT

The US healthcare reform has forced a shift in management focus: instead of looking primarily at costs, the industry is now focusing more on quality. In reality, this shift toward quality is simply another route toward lower costs and better management. Hospitals are now able to see the important role that patient safety plays in the long-term profitability and growth in market share. More than 91% of healthcare organizations have stated that patient safety is a major concern and that all hospitals should include it as part of their strategic plans.

Moving forward, CMS reimbursements will be based on HCAHPS scores, which measure hospital quality and performance. It is estimated that CMS will hold back approximately 1% of hospital payments due to low HCAHPS scores.

This development has succeeded in changing the systemic problem that safety has often experienced, that is being seen as a 'later' issue. Now, safety is an issue that hospitals no longer have the luxury of postponing. The real question is "How hospitals are going to successfully improve patient safety in a cost effective manner?"

Many hospitals are seeing that they must streamline their systems and processes in order to support better quality and safety. To do so, more and more facilities are moving their operations towards a leaner management solution known as the Balanced Scorecard. Glenn Fosdick, CEO of the Nebraska Medical Center, mentions that, "the scorecard provides a means for board members to look at the big picture in terms of hospital performance over several years in a meaningful and efficient manner". In order to streamline their processes, hospitals must strive to put everyone on the same page, top management and staff alike. This shift in strategic objectives will allow hospitals to reduce overall costs, reduce errors, improve services and ultimately improve patient safety.

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Moreover, hospitals are realizing that their outdated paper-based systems cannot effectively meet the requirements of efficiency and cost-effectiveness, as they make it difficult or impossible to compare data and to streamline processes. Too much paper makes efforts wasteful, where no useful data can be found, measured correctly, or used in order to make real decisions. These inefficient paper processes effectively support a lack of accountability in hospitals, which is a key cause of patient safety problems. They create little evidence or data to base decisions on, often resulting in frustration, finger pointing and hidden results. For a successful and cost efficient patient safety program, trends must be determined, action taken in a timely manner and goals for improvement must be set and properly measured. Healthcare facilities who understand this need for real time access to important information, more often than not, implement IT improvements into their facilities.

Fitch Ratings have shown that hospitals with advanced IT systems are more likely to be profitable than ones that do not. IT systems, particularly mobile solutions, will play the largest role due to the benefits, opportunities and advantages that they offer. The greatest advantage that a mobile solution will have on the healthcare system is its ability to obtain and organize information immediately. There will be no more waiting for data, decoding handwriting, or second-guessing peers. Mobile IT solutions have been proven to decrease overall hospital costs by streamlining management processes and delivering high quality data to people who can use it, when they need it.

Mobile IT solutions share and maintain information wherever and whenever it is needed. This creates a structure that keeps everyone on the same page, in turn increasing and supporting communication, processes and accountability. Accurate data trails eliminate the information barrier between top-level management and staff, allowing all levels to verify data and really see and understand unit performance. Good communication and the proper processes leads to a culture that keeps staff aware of patient safety initiatives and of the process involved in upholding them .

With mobile IT systems, data is delivered in a timely manner and can easily be backed up by photos, notes and important information. Data then becomes a stamp: a stamp that can be tracked, measured and compared to. By eliminating duplication, reducing the amount of back and forth and decreasing follow-up time, hospitals are able to better automate their processes from start to finish, creating real time data trails. This encourages accountability and transparency within a hospital's patient safety program, improving prevention of risks and errors. These new mobile systems are allowing hospitals to focus on safety and quality while minimizing costs.

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