COMMUNITY HOSPITAL RESILIENCE: Lessons Learned From an EHR Implementation Amid the Pandemic

IDEAS THAT MATTER

- Community hospitals are an important healthcare provider. There are over 4,000 hospitals in the U.S. with fewer than 300 beds. Staff at community hospitals often wear multiple hats and ancillary departments may be outsourced.

- Lessons learned during the pandemic can be applied to EHR deployments to streamline clinicians' work and position hospitals for future public health emergencies.

- Every community hospital has unique reasons for implementing an EHR. The key to success is deploying a system that supports a positive patient experience, as well as good patient and community health outcomes.

FEATURED EXPERTS

Bonnie McGuire, MS, FNP
Market Segment Management
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Heather O'Brien, MBA, PMP
Professional Services
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Karan P. Singh, MD, MBA, FACEP, FAAEM, CPPS
Chief Quality Officer, Department Chair & Medical Director, Emergency Medicine
San Gorgonio Memorial Hospital, Banning, Calif.

Overview

In a February 2021 roundtable, Bonnie McGuire and Heather O'Brien from Allscripts and Karan P. Singh from San Gorgonio Memorial Hospital discussed challenges and lessons from implementing the Sunrise™ Community Care EHR system during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Key Takeaways

In the coming year, community hospitals will balance evolving patient needs and resource constraints.

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues into 2021, community hospitals' top priorities are simultaneously caring for patients while ensuring the hospital's long-term survival. As the pandemic continues, patient needs are constantly evolving and the trajectory of the pandemic remains unknown. Hospitals are continuing to treat individuals with COVID-19, while turning their attention to administering vaccinations.

During 2020, many organizations put important initiatives on hold, like quality improvement and patient safety projects. Now, they are once again focusing on these efforts. This adds complexity to community hospital operations and many expect that resource constraints will continue to be an issue in the first half of 2021.

Telehealth is here to stay.

Telehealth has become embedded in many hospitals and healthcare settings, since it is a natural solution for addressing barriers to care. During the early stages of the pandemic, healthcare organizations rapidly implemented telehealth capabilities to enhance safety for both patients and providers. In an effort to protect clinical staff and preserve PPE, some hospitals used telehealth solutions to round on patients remotely. There is no question that telehealth has changed the landscape significantly. The shift to telehealth is expected to continue.

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Communication is one of the biggest challenges in healthcare, but EHR systems can help.

As San Gorgonio Memorial Hospital embarked on selecting a new EHR system, one of its overarching goals was to streamline communication. When patients enter the ED, for example, communication occurs with the triage nurse, case management staff, ED physicians, hospitalists and intensivists. The organization wanted everyone communicating on the same platform, so everyone involved in a patient's treatment would have visibility into the patient's care and progression, and it turned to Allscripts Sunrise™ Community Care to help achieve that single platform.

EHR deployments have continued during the pandemic, thanks to new implementation techniques and change management best practices.

The panelists shared lessons learned about implementing EHR systems during the crisis:

- Allocate additional time for organizational buy-in. Dr. Singh noted that generating project support from department leaders took additional time. Although it was challenging to pull clinicians away from bedside care, their input was critical to the successful EHR implementation.

- Keep frontline staff engaged and reassured. It's helpful to identify short-term objectives, define what success means for the organization and engage in clear communication. As part of these activities, San Gorgonio Memorial Hospital analyzed the workflows and workarounds used by clinicians working at the bedside. The goal was to simplify clinicians' jobs and reduce fatigue.

- Leverage technology to limit the size of the onsite implementation team. At San Gorgonio Memorial, Allscripts deployed a small core team to work on-site. This group collaborated with a team of remote resources via video conference.

- Consider new training strategies. Allscripts also transitioned to a virtual platform to educate San Gorgonio Memorial's users, since state gathering rules made in-house classes impractical.

FOUR TIPS FOR SUCCESSFUL EHR IMPLEMENTATIONS AT COMMUNITY HOSPITALS

Evaluate the organization's current state. For example, San Gorgonio Memorial looked at key analytics like door-to-doc time in the ED and length of stay for in-house hospitalizations and readmissions.

Consider the value of standardization. EMR standardization enables organizations to flex staff across multiple facilities without extra training, decrease maintenance costs and enhance data collection and quality reporting.

Engage staff and manage employee expectations. Before going live, spend time with superusers and program advocates who can work with frontline staff and manage expectations.

Identify ways to enhance patient engagement. Patient empowerment is a noteworthy trend from the pandemic. More people want to understand their care options, so they can make informed decisions. Effective patient engagement and empowerment tools include virtual visits, patient portals, AI-powered tools and mobile apps.

ABOUT ALLSCRIPTS

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