

May 7, 2014

Case Study - "Family updates increase waiting room satisfaction"

SSM Health Care – St Louis

Location: St. Louis, MO

Type: Pediatric and Adult Hospitals

Size: Member of the SSM Health Care System

Founded: 1872

MCT User Since: April 2014



The Problem

In general, lack of comfort can be an issue for families in outpatient surgery waiting rooms and are typically not areas for getting high marks in patient satisfaction scores. The exact problem can be hard to pinpoint. That was the situation for the SSM Health Care hospitals in St. Louis, MO.

"We tried multiple things to increase satisfaction with our waiting areas -new furniture, a comfort cart that brought snacks, we offered books," says Mindy Manley, executive director of surgical services. "We've been trying to figure out what to do to make a difference."

A family is already under stress from the burden of worry and the fear of the unknown. This is exacerbated by the feeling of being afraid to leave the waiting room as they may miss important updates from staff or the surgeon. This combination of emotions comes at a natural low point in the patient and family's hospital experience and can easily become a target for a family's frustration.

The Solution

Engaging family members by providing information during this time of stress can ease tension and improve emotional well-being, especially when they know they can receive the updates in real time anywhere on or off campus with their cell phone.

Manley learned about MyCareText and a light bulb went on. "If families could receive text messages at critical points during surgery, they wouldn't feel so tethered to the waiting room."

"I realized the real problem with waiting rooms - it's that people don't want to be there," she explains. "They're tired, they're hungry, they're worried. They don't want to just sit there. MyCareText is a perfect way to encourage people to leave the waiting area and let them do something else," says Manley. "If it's nice outside, they can walk, go to the restaurant across the street, or to the hospital cafeteria."

There was another big benefit. "What we really liked - and what we've seen play out - is that their family members who can't be at the hospital can still feel connected," she adds. "They can get the messages, too, so it relieves their stress."

Here's how it works: the MyCareText software tracks the notes that nurses make in the patient's chart and "translates" them (via the MyCareText software) into family-friendly text messages: "Surgery has started" and "The patient is in recovery." If there needs to be a face-to-face meeting with staff, the message reads: "Please come to the desk."



In April 2014, the six SSM hospitals in St Louis began offering the service to families in the surgical waiting room. From the first day, families gratefully accepted it, says Manley. In the waiting room, families are given a printed card that explains the MyCareText service. It is presented as an option; if families decline, the function is easily switched off. Manley says. "We're just giving them an option so they don't have to stay in one spot."

One primary family member in the waiting room and additional family members anywhere can receive the text message updates. Even relatives in distant states can get the messages, and feel that much closer. This is especially important in a children's hospital, says Manley. "Too often, a child must have surgery, but one parent must be away on a business trip. It's stressful for the parent sitting alone in a hospital waiting room and equally stressful for the parent who's traveling. But with this texting service, both parents are equally involved. They both get updates in real time, and they appreciate it so much."

The Results

Surveying the family members the same day of the surgery yielded 71.36% response rate and a 98.4% positive approval rating. This was based upon a higher than normal response rate indicating not only high marks, but also a motivated set of respondents.

"Our son was having a procedure and we decided to receive the new MyCareText updates," said Kisha Barnes, one of the first MyCareText users at SSM. "The updates were sent sooner than we ever expected and we were kept in the know the entire time. It really took all the guess work and worry out of the equation. It was a great peace of mind, knowing what was occurring with our son."

"We believe it will be just as popular in the adult hospitals," says Manley. "After all, when you bring in an elderly parent – or your spouse – there are plenty of family members who can't be at the hospital. But if they can get the text messages, it helps them feel more connected. It relieves everyone's stress level. "Manley anticipates that Press-Ganey scores will be much improved.

Employee satisfaction with the product is high as well with both users and other hospital staff who had heard of the project. Prior to the MyCareText launch, the hospital's public relations staff informed the surgical services and registration employees, physicians, and the hospital's senior leadership. Flyers were posted in OR areas to inform surgeons. Physician buy-in was immediate, says Manley. "The general feeling is, it's neat and it makes sense."

The big benefit to nursing staff is simplicity, as there is no extra work required of the nurses. The text software works in the background, and the messages are transmitted simultaneously as the OR nurses do their charting.

Stephanie White, Team Leader for Same Day Surgery at SSM St. Mary's Health Center, feels great about having MyCareText in place. "I am excited about the program, especially now that we have a way to give family members the freedom to leave the waiting area. It is great for them to get out and walk or relax." White sees additional uses for simple HIPAA compliant notifications - "We are ready to take it to the next level by incorporating notifications to surgeons of a patient's preparation status."

Based on the overall positive experience, several other areas in the hospital are interested in using MyCareText, including Emergency, Radiology and the Cardiac Catheterization Laboratory. "We want to get the ORs off the ground first, but we're definitely planning to expand," says Manley.

The text messaging service also has public relations value, she notes. "We're doing something innovative that sets us apart. I don't think there's another hospital in Missouri that has this."

MyCareText is a true win-win, an innovation that creates a positive experience for families and patients," adds Manley. "It's something 'real' that we can do for them, something that makes a difference.