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SUCCESS STORY

Communication key to success of new WellStar transfer center; five-hospital health care system partners with PerfectServe



Health system:
WellStar Health System

Location: Atlanta, GA

Beds: 630

Objective: Seamless patient transfers

When the new WellStar Transfer Center in Atlanta went live in August 2013, it was with a clear mission in mind: to enable physicians to communicate quickly, easily and directly so that patient hand-offs could be handled as seamlessly as possible.

Of course, it took months of planning, outreach to dozens of physicians and the involvement of two trusted outsourcing partners to achieve that goal.

In a webinar available online at perfectserve.com, Allison Haldeman, WellStar health system transfer coordinator, detailed the level of planning and coordination that contributed to the center's success.

Communication is key

WellStar Health System, whose flagship facility, Kennestone Hospital, has 630 beds and examines 130,000 patients annually in its ED, turned to a local transfer coordination supplier to help coordinate the setup, Haldeman said.

Since communication is an integral part of the patient transfer process, WellStar assigned PerfectServe the job of designing and implementing the call flow.

The problems faced

The issues WellStar was facing were not unusual. Administrators had no way of knowing when or why transfers were breaking down or how often patients were being sent to other facilities. They had a sense that there were problems but they could not isolate or quantify them.

No clear-cut, repeatable process existed for fast-tracking connections between referring physicians and the appropriate WellStar clinicians. Communication was always on an ad hoc basis, and depended largely on a paper trail.

So WellStar leadership decided to design a whole new system from the ground up.

Dramatic results

A three-month pre-implementation period allowed WellStar to identify project leaders and physician partners, and to develop an in-depth communication plan that would involve physicians, care partners, nurses and administrators.

PerfectServe was able to set up a single customer-service phone number for all referring physicians to use. And since the system utilizes PerfectServe's exclusive rules-based routing, each clinician who is connected is able to specify precisely how he or she wishes to be contacted.

The results have been dramatic.

In the transfer center's first year, it has received more than 2,600 patient transfers, a total that includes a 30 percent increase in non-WellStar patients received.

The center has also seen nearly 90 percent of all transfer communications completed in five minutes or less, with the average response time on a contact of just 3.5 minutes.

And more than half of those contacts resulted in a real-time conversation, which means the transfer agent was able to connect with a physician who could accept the transfer almost immediately.

Timely connection a requirement

Haldeman stressed that timely connection was important to success, since delays could result in patients being sent to competing health systems.

In the webinar, Ted Tully, vice president of DirectCall, WellStar's transfer coordination partner, affirmed that the single-number WellStar communication conduit set up by PerfectServe has resulted in the fastest contact cycle times they've seen in all of their 200 transfer centers.

Terry Edwards, president and CEO of PerfectServe, also outlined the HIPAA-compliance issues involved in setting up the transfer center.

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