How to Gain Productivity in Healthcare
Introduction

The “internet of everything” or the digitization movement is quickly changing the healthcare landscape. As we continue our move towards a value-based delivery system, it’s become increasingly important for hospitals and healthcare systems to deliver quality patient experiences. In trying to achieve this, more than ever, senior quality officers, policy and procedures administrators, risk managers and compliance officers are feeling the pressure of needing to increase efficiencies, cut costs, and relieve front-line staff from shouldering the burden of an increasingly growing workload. Of course, all of this boils down to improving productivity throughout the organization.

So, more than all else, the question has become about productivity and the steps organizations big and small can take to maximize output to minimize cost. In order to do so, it’s important for healthcare leaders to consider a few questions:

1. How can we achieve the best possible outcomes for our patients and ensure our clinicians aren’t overburdened with tasks?
2. Have the solutions we’ve chosen freed up the time of our care teams allowing them to return to the patient bedside?
3. Have we optimized the return of the solutions we’ve implemented?

Streamline Workflow

There is a growing expectation in healthcare for organizations to provide excellent patient experiences and quality care, all while doing it better, faster and without adding staff or expanding budget dollars. To meet these needs, under these particular circumstances, it is extremely important to become operationally efficient and effective. This means, reviewing workflows and filling in gaps to streamline workflows to make the most of what you have.

Regardless of the size of your organization, your specialties of focus, or the number of people you have on staff, a structured and disciplined streamlined workflow is a key component to improving efficiencies and productivity. To start, it’s important to analyze your processes from start to finish and step-by-step to determine gaps and benchmark the current-state of performance. You can choose someone internally to
execute this phase, however, often times it's best to bring in a consultant as they can approach this task without bias, as well as offer recommendations regarding process improvements and help set new objectives.

Often times, in doing this, organizations find automation is an inexpensive means to improve productivity. For example, a good policy and procedure management tool will offer workflow collaboration to help you standardize everything from creation to promotion. This will ensure the right people are notified of their roles every step of the way, but also means less worrying about time consuming communications and tasks, leaving time for staff to focus on patient care.

**Benefits of workflow optimization include:**

- Increase productivity by enhancing process flow
- Identify common constraints related to process and facility inefficiencies
- Reduce expenses by speeding up output
- Build revenue by increasing patient satisfaction
- Eliminate manual, cumbersome approaches
- Have key stakeholders looped into communication flow

**Here are some steps to help you get started:**

**ASSESS THE SITUATION**
- What is the problem?
- What do you want to achieve by fixing the problem? (make sure this is something measureable.)

**MAP THE PROCESS**
- Put pen to paper and document the current workflow and processes

**IDENTIFY THE BOTTLENECKS**
- Identify where in the workflow things tend to slow down or stop completely.
- Determine if it’s the person or process.
- Ask why (is it due to vacation? workload? turnover?)

**PROCESS IMPROVEMENT**
- This is where you determine possible methods to resolve the issue you are experiencing. This may be as simple as ironing out current processes or introducing a new technology.
Adopting Technology

There is little doubt that in the last two decades, we’ve borne witness to a significant amount of funding and investment being placed into the modernization of healthcare IT systems. Hospitals and healthcare systems have had to quickly transition to a digital workflow environment to not only stay competitive but to meet ever-changing regulations and standards requirements.

Adopting technology like tools to manage policies and procedures is a step in the right direction, as solutions of such are designed to help organizations automate and streamline workflow. In some cases, machines just do it better—there’s no shame in admitting it. In the instance of policy and procedure management, introducing technology is partly to do with recognizing that it’s not enough to simply say “do” and expect results—we must start and address productivity at the root of the matter. By properly managing policy and procedures, we ensure that documents have been communicated to all levels, are understood and can always be accessed at point of care.

Technology offers a ton of great productivity and business benefit for hospitals and healthcare systems, from the ability to gather actionable data to mitigate risk and improve patient experiences. For example, a policy and procedure tool can help increase productivity by offering version control so both managers and staff can be confident that they have the right document on hand, the same tool instills confidence across the organization by ensuring comprehension with an attestation feature, and search functionality that helps staff access documents quickly without having to search high and low. This just skims the surface of the vast business benefits a single tool can offer an organization.

TOP 5 HEALTHCARE TECHNOLOGIES TO IMPROVE QUALITY AND PRODUCTIVITY:

1. Electronic Health Record Software
2. Case Management Software
3. Patient Feedback Software
4. Patient Safety/Risk Management Software
5. Policies and Procedure Management Software

If your organization chooses to adopt technology to help assist in day-to-day tasks, it’s important to note that the steps you can take to improve productivity doesn’t end here. While, you may notice a vast difference in efficiencies and processes in the weeks or months to come, there is still an opportunity to optimize not only your workflow but also, your data.
Opening the Lines of Communication

Many hospitals and healthcare systems have been harnessing the power of technology to improve outcomes and reduce costs for years, however in some instances the desired productivity has yet to be fully realized. This has led to a growing demand throughout the healthcare industry for interoperability, in other words, the need for systems that can work cohesively with one another.

Having systems that can work with one another can do wonders for productivity as it supports staff by dramatically cutting down on steps required to complete actions. Lack thereof not only hinders progress and productivity, but also can compromise patient safety, undermine quality of care, contribute to staff fatigue, and wastes budget dollars. Choosing technology that supports interoperability can help organizations access data and validate solutions quicker to help facilitate coordination of care and reduce staff workload, which in turn will increase productivity and improve patient experiences.

For example, linking your policies with a Learning Management System (LMS) to include hyperlinks to educational videos, website links and other documents will make it easier for frontline staff to access materials at the point of patient care. The same goes for cross-walking or linking your policies to accreditation agencies such as TJC, DNV, HFAP and others to receive real-time regulatory changes to make updates accordingly in a timely manner. By linking evidence-based content, your LMS, and cross walking your policies directly to the accreditation agencies can increase your productivity immensely. This automation and linking can increase productivity by 100% while also ensuring your organization is compliance-ready.

Mountain States Health Alliance (MSHA), the largest not-for-profit healthcare system located in northeast Tennessee and southwest Virginia, perfectly exemplifies this as they have modernized their “enterprise-wide” policy and procedure management system by successfully integrating it with a digitized evidence-based content source. In doing so, they have been able to empower front-line staff with online access to a policy library including hyperlinks to evidence-based procedures. With policies linked to the related clinical skills, MSHA has made it significantly easier for front-line staff to find policies within seconds, improve productivity and provide quality patient care.
Never Stop Improving

The beauty of innovation is finding new and different ways to do things. The idea of doing things quicker and better has, after all, been the driving force behind invention all these years. As such, it is crucial that in your search for vendors and solutions you don’t lose sight of your organizational goals. Don’t get jaded by fancy interfaces or bells and whistles, but rather focus on business benefits and stretching the return on investment by asking, “what more can this solution do for me?”

In the end, you’ll find in this time-starved industry that the answer to achieving so many goals, be it enabling staff to do more, improving quality care or patient safety, is increasing productivity.

What’s important to understand here is that your work may never truly be done as technology and requirements will continue to change, that is the beauty of healthcare—there is never a dull moment. In order to stay on course, aligning yourself with other like-minded individuals is essential as you’ll need support, from writing and executing RFPs to getting the buy-in, along the way. Better yet, take a page from MHSA and find out how they were able to modernize their approach.

To help you on your journey of optimizing productivity, here are some additional resources you might find handy!

- [Podcast] Securing the Executive Buy-in for New Healthcare Software
- [Webinar] Closing the Gap! Improving Quality by Linking Healthcare Policies to Evidence-based Procedures

About PolicyMedical

Trusted by more than 3000 healthcare organizations, PolicyMedical is a leading provider of cloud-based enterprise-class healthcare regulatory compliance software solutions designed to reduce administrative burden and enhance patient safety. We were founded in 2001 with the vision to make people happy and healthy by reducing the stress, and anxiety related to policy, contract, vendor and employee management. Our customers include Dignity Health, Kindred Healthcare, Baylor Scott & White Health, Advocate Health Care and others. To learn more, visit www.policymedical.com or take the two-minute virtual PolicyManager tour.