Meeting the challenge of private patient rooms with mobile alert messaging

Historically, patient rooms were designed to maximize caregiver efficiency and patient interaction. As a result, multi-patient rooms were the preferred configuration. Over the past two decades, however, that mindset has changed, prompting hospital administrators to seek other alternatives in delivering effective patient care.

This paper looks at the trend toward private patient rooms and the key drivers for this change, as well as the consequences and challenges for caregivers. It also addresses how hospitals are responding to this new environment through enhanced clinical integration coupled closely with mobile communication.

Better infection control
The number one argument for private rooms is infection control. Thousands of patients each year acquire infections during their hospital stay, health officials report, and having multiple sick patients in the same room increases this possibility. The private patient room helps reduce the risk of infection transmission among patients and makes it easier to quarantine and clean a patient room if an infection is present.

Fewer medical errors
If two patients share a room, that close proximity can increase the risk of delivering medication to, or performing a procedure on, the wrong patient. While private patient rooms are not immune to medical errors, the risk is reduced.

Patient privacy protection
Patient privacy continues to be an overriding concern from both a patient and regulatory perspective. Whether it’s a doctor discussing sensitive health information with a patient, or a patient having a health-related conversation with a loved one, the multi-patient environment is not conducive to privacy and confidentiality. Privacy worries also can inhibit straightforward communication, adding to the stress level of both patient and caregiver and impeding informed decision-making.

Less patient stress – enhanced patient environment
According to research, factors that can induce stress in patients include lack of privacy, noise, and crowding. Thus, it is easy...
to see the connection between private rooms and the patient experience. There are, of course, health implications, as well. Excess noise can lead to increased anxiety and pain perception, loss of sleep and a prolonged convalescence, while stress caused by any source can impair the healing process.¹

**Keeping caregivers and patients connected**

It is reasonable to expect that patients in private rooms will spend less time around their caregivers. So how do providers keep patients and caregivers connected?

Today, there’s an easy answer found in mobile communication software and technology that keeps help close at hand. Administrators are overcoming the challenge of distance and separation by integrating their clinical systems, such as nurse call and patient monitoring, with specially designed software to enable mobile communication, including voice and interactive messaging.

Messaging integration to these clinical systems delivers mobile alert notifications to the caregiver regardless of his or her location in the unit or ward. This allows the caregiver and patient to stay connected, even though they are not physically present in the same room.

For example, nurse call integration with mobile communication software delivers message alert notifications to the caregiver’s mobile device when the patient presses the bedside call button. These messages are typically delivered with a soft key, so a caregiver can easily speak directly with the patient. Rather than feeling disconnected, a patient can express his or her needs directly to the caregiver, attaining peace of mind by the immediate response.

In addition to alert messages, additional information can be provided to help the caregiver quickly assess the appropriate response required. As an example, a patient-monitoring alert message can be enhanced by also providing a waveform image. The ability to quickly review a waveform enhances the caregiver’s decision on how and when to respond — for instance, whether to respond immediately or continue with their current task. For caregivers who are constantly on the go, such specific information can have a meaningful impact on patient care and safety and overall clinical efficiency.

Mobile communication software solves many of the mission-critical communication issues in healthcare today and can have a positive impact on clinical workflow. It also will play an ever-increasing role in the care environment, as mobile access to patient health records is more fully integrated with bedside clinical systems and operational processes. These interactive solutions are a crucial component in helping hospitals deliver effective patient care.

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