Seven Steps to Boost Efficiency and Workflow

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Follow these seven steps to improve efficiency and workflow in your healthcare environment. Real success stories from Children's Medical Center in Dallas, Texas, and Centerpoint Medical Center in Independence, Missouri, supplement each tip to show applicability.

1. Embed technology into the workflow processes at the users' fingertips or at the point of care to simplify use into an integrated system. Children's Medical Center found the Proximity workstations to be an attractive alternative to carts.

"The nurses (at Children's) like the convenience of having the CPU and monitor all in one spot and being able to walk up to it, chart and then fold it back up, and you're out of there," said Tracy Morrison, senior IT infrastructure designer at Children's.

2. Design the healthcare environment around the two most important people in a hospital room: the patient and the nurse. When little thought is given to the available workspace, it shows. Not only does the staff member suffer, but the patient does, too. At Centerpoint Medical Center, the computers needed to be positioned to allow for the best possible face-to-face interaction. When positioned correctly, the patient and caregiver engaged in a real conversation and communication improved. The computer moves from the focus of the interaction to the background.

3. Involve key personnel from all areas and departments within the hospital on the project team. Nominate a strong leader to facilitate and mediate the process and involve the selected technology vendor as well.

"Whenever we're designing a space, some of the first questions we ask our people are, 'Where do they want the computer in the room, and how they are going to chart?'" Morrison said. "The Proximity design team meets with us; will look at the plans; and brainstorm with the department, myself and the other groups that are involved to come up with the best solution."

4. Customize to your environment. There's no one-size-fits-all when it comes to wall-mounted, retractable workstations. Address varying workflow requirements, site conditions, equipment and medications/supplies. One of Proximity's greatest strengths is its ability to work with the customer to design and produce a custom solution. This flexibility contrasts with companies that simply distribute generic solutions. 90% of Proximity's production is a variation on an existing model.

5. Remember ergonomics. Keep in mind what makes the nurse more efficient and comfortable and how the workstation is configured in relationship to the patient. The in-room computers and workstations at Centerpoint eliminate the need to go back to the nurse's station to chart, get information or pick-up certain supplies. Fewer steps by the staff have led to increased efficiency and decreased staff fatigue.

6. Address the aesthetics. With today's focus on enhancing the appearance of hospitals and improving patient experience, workstations need to be aesthetically designed to accommodate a wide range of interior design considerations. According to Shannan Pfeiffer, Centerpoint's director of information technology and services, the look of the Proximity computer workstations provided another benefit: "In opening this new hospital, we were very in tune with everything related to design."

The wood construction and custom finish of the Proximity workstations allowed Centerpoint to achieve the desired consistent look, complementing the furniture throughout the hospital.

7. Meet nurses' needs for a better solution to cumbersome, difficult mobile devices. Chaotic, complex and inefficient working environments contribute to nursing stress, dissatisfaction, staff turnover and diminished capacity to provide quality patient care. At Centerpoint, the option of using computers on carts to reduce the distance nurses walked was quickly dismissed.

"We had a few mobile units in our (other) hospitals, but found that they take quite a beating running up and down the halls," Pfeiffer said.

Proximity workstations, on the other hand, were proven in an independent study to reduce the distance nurses walk by up to 80%. Plus, since the units are stationary, they do not place added wear and tear on the computers.