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A sensitive time: The problems that can arise with transitions of care

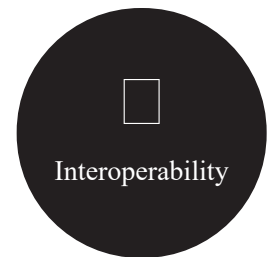
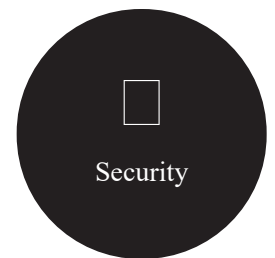


June 14, 2016

Like many things in life, so much of healthcare is dependent on effective communication. But unlike other industries, the stakes are raised in healthcare – a miscommunicated memo, indiscernible handwriting or inaccessible electronic medical records can mean that a patient’s health is put at risk, sometimes with disastrous results.

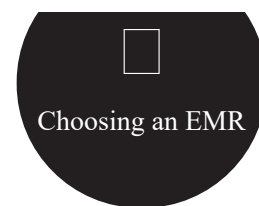


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Paying attention to TOCs

As healthcare networks expand, including those involving home health and hospice agencies, providing seamless transitions of care becomes ever the more vital. [Transitions of care](#), also referred to as TOC, refers to when a patient is transferred from one healthcare setting to another, Pharmacy Times explained. A TOC can be when a patient with a chronic condition is discharged from the hospital and sent to a home care setting, when a patient with a life-threatening condition is moved to palliative care, or when an individual with a terminal illness is transferred to the care of a hospice agency. Regardless of the setting, it is vital that all pertinent patient data is easily accessible and that information is effectively communicated during a TOC. A controlled and gentle transition to a new healthcare setting not only puts the patient at ease and reduces anxiety, but also helps reduce the likelihood of life-threatening medical errors.



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care

Effective communication is essential during transitions of care.

The value of partnerships

Recognizing the power of focusing on quality of care, and not quantity, Accountable Care Organizations are growing, and are implementing systems that allow them to more effectively exchange patient health information and data. Similarly, recognizing the challenges to TOCs, some health providers are banding together. Fox 8 profiled the work of Cone Health and Triad HealthCare Network in North Carolina. The two organizations partnered to improve the TOC process for those who experience strokes. After an individual has a stroke, they are discharged from the hospital with instructions on medications they should take and rehabilitation practices they should follow, which the source noted can be overwhelming for most people. The two organizations banded together to provide greater

oversight of patient's health and journey to recovery.

Problems related to poor communication

There are a number of problems that can arise when there is zero or poor communication during TOCs. A primary issue is related to medication orders. Consider a patient with a chronic condition that he has to manage. He visits his primary care doctor for his scheduled appointment, and the doctor prescribes him a new prescription which he begins taking immediately. Then, the patient is sent to see a specialist for the next few months. Because of poor communication or inaccessible medical records, the specialist does not know about the prescription the primary care doctor prescribed. The specialist then prescribes a new medication, which negatively interacts with the drug the patient is currently taking.

“There are many unfortunate scenarios that can arise from poor communication.”

There are many other unfortunate scenarios that can arise from poor communication. If all the health professionals involved in the multiple healthcare settings that the patient is treated in do not have equal and easy access to their records, the patient can have difficulty simply setting up follow-up appointments. A patient may fall off the radar, or be ordered to repeat tests because their primary care doctor or home care provider does not know their test

history.

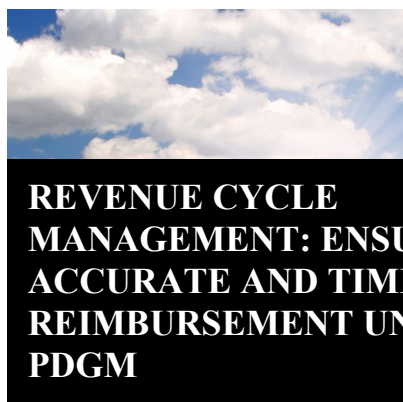
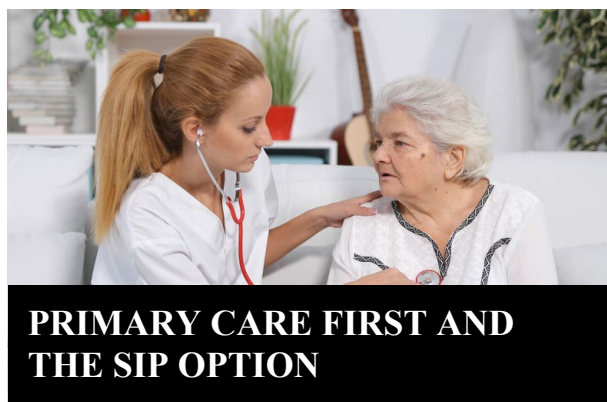
The importance of interoperability

To help avoid these issues and provide the best care possible for patients, it's important that all health providers, home health and hospice agencies included, use electronic medical records software that is optimized for interoperability. Otherwise, a patient's records and health information is inaccessible and they are put at risk.

More and more agencies are adopting EMRs, but that does not mean that they're all using the same system. That's where interoperability comes into play – health professionals need to be able to access a patient's comprehensive medical history and records wherever they are and whenever they require care. File compatibility is essential the effective exchange of information, helping TOCs go more smoothly and better protecting the health and safety of the patient.

TOCs are designed to improve a patient's health, not jeopardize it. Make sure you are providing the best quality care by taking advantage of Thornberry's [NDoc software](#). Designed for interoperability, it helps ensure that patients receive the best care, wherever and whenever they need it.

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