NYU Langone Reduces Physician Burnout with Phone and Message Nurse Triage

Summary

NYU Langone Health is one of the nation's premier academic medical centers. Their trifold mission "... to serve, teach, and discover is achieved daily through an integrated academic culture devoted to excellence in patient care, education, and research." Adherence to this mission has brought high praise for the hospital.



Challenge

NYU Langone Health had completed a successful Electronic Medical Records system implementation, and the patient population responded enthusiastically. Patients very quickly learned to use and benefit from the features that allowed them to email providers and staff via the EMR system. They were able to ask questions, request records, schedule appointments, inquire about new and existing conditions, and more.

Nicole Dittmar, Assistant Vice President of Ambulatory Operations & Optimization for NYU Langone, described it this way: "With the advent of electronic medical records and patient portals, patients suddenly had a new way to contact their providers. Rather than picking up the phone to call their doctor — the old-fashioned way of doing everything — to ask about a test result or appointment, they now had a new, fast and easy way to get what they needed. No more busy signals, no hold music, or waiting for a call to be returned. They were now able to quickly get whatever they needed by typing a note, clicking a couple of links, or checking a box or two."

Care Coordination Solutions

Omega Healthcare can help free up physicians' time by reducing administrative burdens while enhancing patient satisfaction.

- Customer Contact Center
- Phone & Message Nurse Triage
- Remote Patient Management
- Provider & Member Communication

Thousands of after-hours email messages from patients overwhelm doctors and staff

The popularity of this powerful new communication tool had a flip side no one had considered in advance. Rapid patient adoption and use meant there were suddenly thousands of additional messages for doctors and staff — messages that had never existed in the past. Ms. Dittmar described it as “an unexpected stream of work” for doctors and staff. “All of a sudden the end of a physician’s day looked completely different,” Dittmar said. “No longer did they settle in after clinic hours to return a few patient phone calls. Added to those phone calls were dozens, sometimes a hundred or more patient emails.”

And as is often the case with electronic communication, exchanges were rarely limited to a single message. It was usually several exchanges in a single thread and, as patients became more and more sophisticated in their use of the portal, the number of messages increased rapidly.

“When you look at a physician practice there’s the patient-facing activity and the non-patient facing activity,” Dittmar continued. “This new activity was all part of the non-patient facing variety. Traditionally, a clinic is a team dedicated to just getting through the day—office visits and all the associated activities that need to be done. Then, at the end of the day, there’s a hundred test results from two days earlier when you drew all those bloods; there’s the prescription refills, and regulatory requirements are more stringent. Twenty years ago, the person at the front desk could call the pharmacy and get you a refill. That’s changed completely.



Today everything requires a signature, but it’s not economically feasible to have highly skilled, highly paid nurses running around doing those kinds of tasks, nor do you always have the skilled staff on site to answer every question or address every situation.”

Nor was the added workload confined to the doctors. “Many of the messages were directed at our doctors, but most of them were going to staff. It didn’t take long to see that the number of messages was growing rapidly. It’s tens of thousands of messages across multiple practices. It’s like a second inbox full of messages added to a schedule that’s already full.”

Physicians and staff needed help manage this new kind of work across practices.

Defining Needs and Requirements

Dittmar and her colleagues set about to determine their precise needs and solve this new challenge. At the top of their list was the need for a vendor that would always provide them with a highly qualified virtual team. Ms. Dittmar was firm on this point. “New York State has very strict guidelines regarding the scope of practice for the various different clinical roles, and we wanted absolute assurance that Omega Healthcare could provide resources that were skilled, trained, and able to work as part of our team and do the work we needed them to do.

They also needed flexibility and responsiveness. “We needed to have people that could pivot and be flexible, able to respond to whatever needs we had. We started this program pre-COVID. Right in the middle of it, we had to shift into pandemic mode. Our numbers went through the roof, and it was a real challenge to manage everything. Omega Healthcare certainly filled that bill. They not only helped us in that moment, but quickly became a partner that would grow and evolve with us — that would adapt and change as our needs would change.”

Solution

NYU Langone chose Omega Healthcare’s Phone and Message Triage solution to meet the increasing patient use of the communication tools the hospital had deployed, but that were overtaxing the time and resources of clinic physicians and staff.

Every Omega Healthcare nurse has industry experience with, and awareness of, industry best practices and is trained in the use of more than 150 practice management systems and tools.

Working as an integral part of the Langone Health team, Omega Healthcare’s virtual nurses are the first to see, evaluate, and answer incoming patient calls and messages. Fully licensed in the State of New York, they work directly within NYU Langone’s Electronic Health Records (EHR), asking patients about their symptoms, existing health problems, and any relevant history of medical issues. They then leverage the same decision tree, database, and workflow to understand patient needs, conditions, and potential treatments; then recommend the proper level of care.

Outcomes

Omega Healthcare’s Care Coordination Solutions have relieved the burden of the “unexpected stream of work” and give physicians more time. In addition, the clinical team in the practices are also getting more time to focus on face-to-face interactions. This means the clinics grow the volume of their practices without having to grow clinical support staff.

“The onsite team returns once again to a focus on face-to-face tasks, while the offsite teams handle the other tasks. In addition, we’re now finding we have been able to grow many of our sites without adding new providers and staff, because we now have this incredible resource behind the scenes.”

Omega Healthcare’s Care Coordination solutions help healthcare organizations seamlessly capitalize on the expertise of hundreds of qualified, certified nurses to support care management, patient outreach, payor interaction, and clinical documentation initiatives.

Want to learn more?
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