

Overcoming Communication Challenges in Complex Patient Care Delivery

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As agencies address regulatory mandates and new Conditions of Participation (CoPs) that require efficient communication, every agency must also ensure that care coordination and delivery is uninterrupted. Most importantly, as the foundation to how service is delivered, streamlined communication drives patient satisfaction and the quality scores that determine your business' success.

But there have been, and continue to be, challenges to making communication in healthcare as effective as it needs to be. These include the increase in smartphone usage, growth of [hacking and data breaches](#), the growing percentage (42% at the start of 2017) of older adults who [have and use smartphones](#) and heightened expectations for [innovative and tech-enabled patient engagement](#).

To gain insight into challenges and the role that secure texting can play in overcoming these challenges, we address communication topics with industry experts:

- **David Hemendinger**, Chief Information Officer/Chief Security Officer of HopeHealth
- **Ari Mavrogiorgis**, LynX Management Group/ Director YourDrs
- **Galina Datskovsky**, Ph.D., CRM, FAI, CEO of Vaporstream

Q1. What is the impact of typical store and forward messaging such as email on the delivery of care, i.e. its tendency to miscommunicate requirements, mask urgency, and blur next steps?

(DH): "We are a hospice and visiting nurse home care organization in the Northeast. Many people become numb to email noise as it is difficult to ferret through the messages to find those that are important. There is simply too much information relayed in an email, and it is difficult to find the real information needed to treat the patient. Even if that information is critical, it takes a long time to find the criticality inside lengthy emails. Also, the tendency to carbon copy people – that is risky to the organization in terms of Personal Health Information (PHI) – did the people in the email really have the need to know? Moving to a secure texting platform allows us to eliminate the noise. and the

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email numbness. Text messages are taken seriously and are viewed as they come in. Mobile devices also prevent too much typing or information overload. Messages are more succinct, more accurate and direct. Clearer, faster communication means collaboration happens in real time and patient issues get resolved quickly. It has ended the practice of 'hiding behind the email' which is huge."

(GD): "Email is a technology of the 20th century, entering in the 90's as a boost to communication. But it is difficult to prioritize and know what is critical. Too often, messages tend to sit and are responded to over time – and may be overlooked. Texts get a response immediately –typically seeing over a 90% open rate, with a response rate of at least 50-60%. It is a more immediate and interactive response medium from a usability standpoint, hence the reason it has become the preferred communication standard for today's healthcare professional. Utilizing secure text messaging ensures that communications can occur in a confidential and HIPAA compliant manner, unlike standard SMS Text. It also ensures the rapid collaboration and response required for patient care."

Q2. What could have been done differently to improve communication during the many natural disasters of 2017 – the post-hurricane crisis in the [Hollywood Hills](#) nursing home as an example, where miscommunication led to the death of 14 senior citizens who were not appropriately evacuated?

(DH): "Here in Rhode Island, Tropical Storm Philip came up the coast in October of 2017. We had 90 mile-per-hour winds and half the state was without power. At Hope, we have been using a secure messaging platform as part of our emergency response plan – and in this particular week it paid for itself immensely. Vaporstream enabled us to communicate with our staff, nursing homes, senior living centers through-out the event. Email might have been the

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way people might try to communicate, but with a mobile workforce it is different. A high percentage of our workers were able to access messages and respond immediately, even though they were in locations without power.”

(AM): “Having an open communication environment is essential during times of crisis. Consider the tragedy where people were trampled in Manhattan – people did not know who was involved and family members did not know the status of their loved ones. Who needed medical attention? If there was some universal form of communication where people who are involved can send a distress message – I need help, for example, that is what is needed at times like this. If the nursing home had been able to communicate directly with family and/or first responders, local hospital, hopefully the outcome would have been very different.”

(GD): “Searching through email messages is quite different from receiving an emergency message. With an emergency management protocol, advanced secure messaging platforms enable you to preset and automate communication flows – for example if a hurricane is on its way. You can activate an event that includes a series of notifications set for various constituencies. In a hurricane, the steps could include preparation, check-in during the event and post-event status and instructions, all triggered by that event. You can cancel messages if not needed during the event. Texting is an important way to deal with emergencies, including prepared attachments and forms. In this scenario, the local hospital, first responders and family would all have been in the loop.”

Q3. To what degree is streamlining the interactions during a cycle of complex care important to reduce miscommunications? How can this be done if needed?

(DH): “In home care, we receive referrals from partners. Key is the way to lower hospital readmissions. We use secure texting in two ways:

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1) for high risk patients, if clinical parameters have multiple co-morbidities, require contacting the Primary Care Physician (PCP), the case managers or Accountable Care Organization (ACO) partners, we use secure texting for that.

2) We are using secure texting today to re-route practitioners to more critical patients during the day. We have the re-routing ties into a scheduling system and notifies the clinician on their cell phones. They can get the text while they see one patient and know that they need to see another, not previously scheduled. This improves our workflow.”

(AM): “My main experience in healthcare is a private practice aspect – I manage physician specialties. There were shortcomings – an orthopedic treating a patient with shoulder pain, and another specialist treating for pain management. The two did not know what the other specialist was recommending – because the chart was not being reviewed. In the end, the patient did not need those treatments. That is why we launched YourDrs – which enables physicians to collaborate in a secure way to achieve better outcomes, and reduce medical costs as well. An adjustor portal enabled bridging communication across stakeholders. We start that at the time a patient enters our center – the patient becomes the center of treatment. We found that 40% of our patients have improved quality of care now.

(GD): “This is critical not only for the care team, but for the patient as well. Keeping the [circle of care](#) on the same page is vital for patient outcomes. However, as it is common for patients to only remember 20 – 60% of care instructions, it is also vital to keep the patient on the same page. Automating communications for appointment reminders, medication reminders, wellness programs, discharge instructions or pre- and post- surgical instructions can be game changers when it comes to ensuring positive outcomes, decreasing readmissions and preventing lost revenue from missed appointments.”

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Q4. So how do you invite participants into a circle of caring text? And how does that apply to medication dosages or procedures, which could result in miscommunication?

(DH): "Our PCPs and other stakeholders see the benefit of creating tighter relationships and are pleased to participate in using a more secure and immediate way to communicate. From a meds standpoint, when a new set of meds are added, it is added to the EMR and also communicated to the participants that need to know. It is secure and HIPAA compliant."

(GD): "The invitation process is easy. Either someone is part on an organization using the secure messaging platform, or they can be invited as a third party to download the app. The enterprise version provides the administrative controls for management, compliance and engagement necessary for organizational deployment. For the patient, or the PCP, there is a free application that can be downloaded. As an example, surgical clinics, invite patients to download the app as part of the surgical process. The clinic can go through their practice management system to invite the patient and control the type of interactions. This way the patient can be reminded about what they need to do before a surgery - maybe discontinue blood thinners, eating, stop liquids, as well as the actual surgical appointment and aftercare. This is an effective usage of texting, allowing the event handler technology to communicate and manage communications, see the response, respond if the message is not read. This improves care to the patient, but also maximizes facility utilization and patient engagement."

Q5. Can patients initiate communications in this environment?

(AM): "There are two ways our patients can initiate communication. Patients have a provider search portal – they can log in to create an appointment, which then creates a secure portal and can begin managing their record, which based

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on granted access, can communicate to their provider or other providers that are allowed/approved to have access to this patient. Second way: if the patient is not a member, but they can register at a facility for an appointment. Then as they seek a provider on the site, once they are a patient the primary doctor can grant access to communicate with other physicians as required.”

(GD): “In Vaporstream patients can send complex messages. Every practice or agency will be different in how much they provide access, i.e. one address for the practice vs direct contact to a nurse, home care nurse or physician. For any patient communications it is important however that they are

1. HIPAA compliant,
2. that they disappear from mobile devices in order to maintain patient confidentiality and security at all times, and
3. That information cannot be shared to prevent information leaks.”

Q6. If you could change something about care delivery through better, smarter communication what would it be?

(DH): “For me, more succinct, more accurate, more timely information at the place and time where the clinicians need it – right place, right time, anywhere they need it. That would enable clinicians to make the best clinical choice.”

(AM): “For us: I have seen shortcomings in medical software systems that are closed and thus it is difficult for providers to communicate with other providers. We have social media sites – our whole lives revolve around social media – and yet our software systems mean that Epic can’t communicate with Athena Health as an example. Changing that would streamline healthcare delivery.”

(GD): “Simplification is most important. I would like to see the routine communications more automated and simplified, delivered in a more accessible

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manner and language. This simplification would make a difference to patients and clinicians. What matters is delivering in a secure, confidential way that the patient understands and that delivers positive outcomes to everyone involved.

Conclusion:

The discussion highlights the issues that burden overly complex communications in healthcare today – which has challenged responsiveness of organizations in emergencies and delayed response. Secure texting within defined and repeatable processes is one way to sift through that complexity and help protect organizations from the security threats and information overload challenges faced today.

About Vaporstream

Vaporstream® empowers long term and post-acute care organizations (LTPAC) to securely leverage the efficiencies of modern day mobile messaging while ensuring the protection of sensitive information, compliance and confidentiality. Built by compliance and security experts with over 30 years of experience in the content management industry, Vaporstream Secure Messaging provides a secure, ephemeral and compliant text messaging solution that enhances mobility, information governance and compliance initiatives. LTPAC organizations can now securely embrace text messaging to safely improve efficiency, increase patient engagement and revenue. Recognized for its patented ephemeral messaging platform and advanced security, Vaporstream's SaaS-based application offers the robust feature set and best-in-class infrastructure needed to meet the most complex requirements. With expertise serving regulated industries, Vaporstream enables healthcare organizations of all sizes to provide an improved care team (and patient) experience and more importantly - superior patient care - without jeopardizing security or compliance. To find out more, go to www.vaporstream.com.

About Aging in Place Technology Watch

Laurie M. Orlov, a tech industry veteran, writer, **speaker** and elder care advocate, is the founder of [Aging in Place Technology Watch](#) -- market research, trends, blogs and reports that provide thought leadership, analysis and guidance about technologies and services that enable boomers and seniors to remain longer in their home of choice. Her perspectives have been quoted in Business Week, CNBC, Forbes, Kiplinger, NPR, the Wall Street Journal, and the New York Times, where she was profiled as well. Her latest reports were Tech-Enabled Home Care 2017 published in January and a 2017 Update Market Overview Technology for Aging in Place. The site was selected as one of CDW's Top 50 Health IT Blogs in 2016 and in September, 2017, she was named one of the Top 50 Influencers in Aging by Next Avenue.