

What Is the Importance of Communication in Health Care?

For hospitals and health care institutions, ensuring that patients receive proper care takes more than performing procedures and making diagnoses. Communication is a crucial component in all steps of the health care process. Whether it be a clinic accurately sharing patient information with another facility, or a group of doctors, nurses, specialists, and other staff at a hospital discussing how to treat current and incoming patients, the need for concise, effective communication is always present in the health field.

Organizations with strong communication policies can enrich their patients' health, while those that don't have effective procedures in place can negatively impact patient well-being. Health care professionals and institutions need to recognize the importance of communication in health care in order to thrive.

Interhospital vs. Intrahospital Communications

There are two types of communication methods that health care institutions use that are crucial to patient safety and well-being: interhospital and intrahospital.

Interhospital

Interhospital communications involve information sharing among multiple sites or institutions. This includes transmissions between facilities owned by the same organization and between completely separate health care entities. Moving patients from one facility to another, sending medical records, and transporting vital medical equipment all require clear communication between sites.

However, hospitals often encounter obstacles in communicating effectively with one another. A study conducted by the Center for Health Information and Decision Systems (CHIDS) found that poor interhospital communication costs the industry upward of \$12 billion annually. Inadequate communication drives up costs by preventing institutions from accessing patients' medical files, which may create a need for duplicate tests and second opinions that would not otherwise be necessary.

Intrahospital

Problems with communication also occur among personnel within the same hospital. Intrahospital communication is any information sharing within a singular institution — whether it involves coordinating room changes, scheduling surgeries, assigning further tests, or even setting up appointments. When doctors, staff, and patients are not effectively sharing information, the efficiency of each process may decrease, potentially resulting in unnecessary costs or even danger to patients. Patient record delays, lack of procedural coordination, and even serious medical errors may all be consequences of poor intrahospital communication.

Common Communication Methods

Each health care system has multiple forms of communication that administrators and staff must be trained to use properly and efficiently. When even one of these communication methods fails, patient safety can be put at risk. A minor printing mistake could lead to incorrect dosages, or incomplete information may keep a doctor from knowing about a crucial allergy. Understanding how standard communication methods work is the first step in ensuring that a hospital is running as smoothly as possible, for both the patients' and the hospital's sake. To that end, here are some of the most common ways that hospitals and other health care systems communicate and share information.

Transmitting Patient Data

Patient records are shared securely via inter- and intrahospital communications. Delays in receiving records can cost hospitals millions of dollars each year in unnecessary expenses. Patient data are used to create a thorough medical history and provide appropriate medical care. When patient data aren't shared between departments or other health care organizations, there may be a much higher chance of practice errors and subsequent increased costs.

Collaborating with Colleagues

Intrahospital communication relies heavily on collaboration between colleagues. Patients, lab technicians, doctors, and staff all need to be in constant communication to create a system that operates as smoothly as possible. Inter-colleague collaboration also includes entering information accurately into databases, especially shared ones. Inaccurate communication between departments can lead to errors in database entry, which, in turn, can potentially risk patient safety.