Improving Patient Safety with Technology

Introduction
The long, gray hallway in the inpatient rehabilitation unit has information on bulletin boards about the importance of preventing falls, and reminders to frequently wash your hands to prevent the spreading of germs. All of the patients in this ward wear yellow hospital-issue socks to alert the staff that that patient has a high risk of falling. A nurse wheels a mobile computer into a patient’s room to deliver medication. Before administering the medication to the patient, the care provider scans the patient’s bar coded wristband and asks the patient to recite his birthdate for the care provider to confirm he/she is administering medication to the correct patient. All of these are examples of this hospital unit’s safety procedures to prevent healthcare-related mistakes.

According to the Institute of Medicine in its jaw-dropping Nov. 1999 report, *To Err is Human*, one of the top 10 leading causes of deaths per year are healthcare-related mistakes, and it reports that an estimated 44,000 and as many as 98,000 deaths in the U.S. were from preventable adverse events due to medical errors.

Reporting close calls and good catches
Investigating reported close calls, also called ‘good catches’, is an effective method of preventing the same event from happening in the future that could have more severe consequences.

Close calls are brief moments when bad things don’t happen. The National Safety Council defines ‘near misses’ as an event in which no property was damaged and no personal injury was sustained, but if they were, given a slight shift in time or position, damage and/or injury easily could have occurred.

Changing the culture
“To change the culture, you have to have champions as well as have good tools and systems,” said Dr. Paul Lindeman, Chief Medical Information Officer at veEDIS Clinical Systems, in a webinar, entitled “Health IT and Patient Safety,” hosted by Advisen. Lindeman specializes in connecting clinical, technical, and executive worlds with the single focus of using technology to improve the quality of care for patients.

Dr. Peter Pronovost, an expert in patient safety, who introduced an intensive care checklist protocol that saved 1500 lives and $100 million during an 18-month period in the State of Michigan, wrote a book dedicated to improving patient safety. In his book, *Safe Patients. Smart Hospital*, Pronovost outlines his Comprehensive Unit-based Safety Program (CUSP), which is an effective method of changing culture beginning with individual units. Pronovost’s theory is that a culture change starts with small units within the hospital where the patient interacts with the healthcare system, and he recommends the following steps:
• Survey and measure the culture.
• Empower individuals to help identify the problems and solutions. They know where
the problems are, so let them be a part of the solution.
• Executive buy-in -- changing the culture won’t happen if the executive management team doesn’t support the process.
• Measure and keep data to reassess performance.

“It’s important to encourage the reporting of near misses and unsafe conditions,” said Brian Stromberg, healthcare sales executive at Riskonnect, the provider of a premier, enterprise-class technology platform for the risk management industry. Stromberg said that organizations need a modern technology solution that makes analyzing that data easy. “Staff shouldn’t be spending hours generating a report to share with a committee. They should be easy to produce so there is more time to focus on the data to spot trends, do root cause analysis, and implement strategies to prevent these errors from happening,” Stromberg said.

The key step is to disseminate report findings back to the staff so they see their time in reporting events is being used to improve patient safety. “If you ask or tell a physician to change his/her behavior, you are going to be met with some resistance,” Lindeman said. “But if you have the data to show the physicians, they will be moved by that, and they will be much more likely to cause a change in culture when they have the data to go along with your message.”

**Reasons why many near misses aren’t reported**
Some may think that since there was no patient injury, close calls do not need to be reported or investigated. Investigation forms are too time-consuming to complete, or the forms are not easily accessible (such as having to complete paper forms). Many times, busy caregivers are pressed for time and filling out incident reports doesn’t become a priority.

Punitive action is a valid concern for staff reporting a near miss. If the organization has a transparent and well-defined safety program in place to identify problems in the system with the end-goal of protecting the patient and to not place blame on the employee, then reporting close calls becomes second nature and will be a collaborative and potentially life-saving effort within your organization.

**Simplifying the reporting process**
In order for an incident reporting system to be successful and to increase reporting, it must be easy to use and access and be customizable.

Imagine a system that is:
• secure, compliant with all applicable laws and regulations, and doesn’t require a programming degree to operate
• easily accessible by registered and non-registered users from any computer within your organization, or from any mobile device that has the app installed,
• and in which an incident can be quickly and easily initiated by just pressing an icon on the desktop, or opening the app, and completing an interview-style questionnaire customized for your organization.

Risk managers and patient safety coordinators would spend less time on administrative tasks with a system that sends them instant notifications when an incident has been reported, when a claim has been entered, and that allows them to follow the investigation process.

**The Solution**
Riskonnect’s Healthcare Work Platform enables the complete handling of healthcare risk management, quality

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of care, patient safety, and employee management. The system brings together many disparate operations that traditionally have been supported by individual applications. The Riskonnect Healthcare Work Platform helps support the reduction of risk and helps risk managers to ensure safety processes are in place to provide greater attention to areas that will increase patient safety and improve patient outcomes.

Riskonnect’s Healthcare Work Platform is customizable, easy to use, and accessible on mobile devices. It is easy to pull up and complete a short form to report an event, meaning it won’t take much time away from clinicians to provide patient care. The system’s user-friendliness will result in increased reporting because it’s no longer a hassle.

The Riskonnect system also allows for communication and collaboration. When staff see that they can quickly involve a subject matter expert and get their feedback, they can see some of the benefits of reporting events - to encourage quick intervention and resolution.

Automation in the Riskonnect system reduces the workload. When an event (whether it is a close call or an actual incident) is reported, staff are notified and automatically assigned a task to complete per hospital policy, eliminating this typically manual process.

Reporting events allows you to notify people to put systems in place. An event can be tied to a root cause analysis or to a peer review. Reporting in the Riskonnect system allows risk managers to build a database where everything is integrated onto one platform, making it easier to spot trends as they relate to events, locations, or care providers.

Social collaboration improves culture and communication
Riskonnect has a unique feature called Chatter, and it works very similar to Facebook. System users can join groups and be updated whenever there’s new information pertaining to that group. Stromberg reports that some Riskonnect clients set up a ‘Safety Champion’ group. Whenever a care provider reports an unsafe condition, a close call, or good catch, he/she is acknowledged within the group for their reporting efforts. Stromberg said, “Sharing in the successes of improving patient safety is an excellent way to encourage and improve the culture of reporting. The staff will be more likely to report knowing that their efforts are benefiting the patients. “

Best of all, Chatter can be accessed on mobile devices, making it even more easy to stay updated while on the go.

Patient safety 14 years later - much worse than we thought
In 2013, the Journal of Patient Safety conducted a followup study to the Institute of Medicine’s 1999 “To Err is Human” report, and discovered there is actually a staggering 400,000 preventable deaths each year in U.S. hospitals, up from the 44,000 to 98,000 estimates first reported 14 years prior. This makes deaths from preventable medical error the number 3 cause of death in U.S. hospitals behind cancer and heart disease!

The epidemic of patient harm in hospitals must be taken more seriously if it is to be curtailed. Fully engaging patients and their advocates during hospital care, systematically seeking the patient’s voice in identifying harms, transparent accountability for harm, and intentional correction of root causes of harm is necessary to accomplish this goal. It happens in small steps... from the yellow colored socks in the inpatient rehab unit, to the staff keeping a keen eye open to spot and report potential unsafe conditions, to the physician quickly responding to an inquiry or event through a handheld mobile device while making rounds. It is all possible with Riskonnect’s Healthcare Work Platform.

About Riskonnect, Inc.
Riskonnect, Inc. is the provider of a premier, enterprise-class technology platform for the risk management industry. As an independent innovator in risk management software, Riskonnect develops and markets a growing suite of software solutions on a world-class cloud computing model helping clients elevate their risk management programs, safety solutions, and programs for management of risks across the enterprise. Through its strategic, operational, and insurable risk software applications, Riskonnect provides the risk management industry with the specific, configurable solutions needed to reduce losses, control risk, and affect shareholder value. For more information about Riskonnect, contact us at www.riskonnect.com, email to info@riskonnect.com or call 770-790-4700.