

A rural California hospital sought to leverage automation to improve how they met the CMS Discharge Planning Rule of the IMPACT Act of 2014

The final rule (Revisions to Discharge Planning Requirements [CMS-3317-F]) revises the discharge planning requirements that hospitals (including long-term care hospitals, critical access hospitals [CAHs] psychiatric hospitals, children's hospitals, and cancer hospitals), inpatient rehabilitation facilities, and home health agencies must meet to participate in Medicare and Medicaid programs. It requires the discharge planning process to focus on a patient's goals and treatment preferences.

Problem to Solve

There were multiple challenges related to meeting the provision of choice requirements when discharging patients during transition of care at Sierra View Medical Center, Porterville, California. **Devon Barlow-Merritt, Manager of Care Continuum at Sierra View Medical Center** was clear that the biggest problem needing solving was the mandate itself, to provide discharging patients a choice of facilities for transitional care.

Devon shared that *"There was no consistent documented process. And though not the most urgent problem, the workflow was as important to the organization as the mandate compliance itself. And the implementation of technology was also particularly important."*

Sierra View Medical Center (Sierra View) is a 167-bed full service acute care hospital in rural central California. Reaching close to 80%, the payer mix is a combination of Medicare and Medi-Cal. Sierra View is approximately 45 minutes away from the next nearest hospital so though not a Critical Access Hospital (CAH), they function very much like one. And with their payer mix, the patient demographic is comprised heavily of Indigenous patients. In addition, an extensive Hispanic population brings language barriers and therefore health education challenges.

As Devon describes it, the previous workflows didn't provide a way to show that a choice had been provided patients. Because of that, there was no way to refer to the choices provided or selected. In situations where post-acute facilities felt slighted, Sierra View was unable to provide evidence of that being untrue.

When social workers changed shifts, there was no communication hand off process in place. That meant social workers taking over the care of a patient might not know what choices had been selected by the patient and/or family. This caused significant redundant work.

The care management staff at Sierra View is small, so the lack of streamlined workflows added additional stress to the already stretched staff.

When asked if there were numeric implications of the old way of doing things, Devon explained that the answer was *“No, because there was no collection of data for the choices selected. That was another problem. There was no way of tracking referrals or disputing claims by post-acute organizations.”*

Strategy and Tactics

Sierra View selected NurseCare to partner with them to solve their mandate issues and implement a patient centric and employee and partner friendly solution. Choice 360 software was the system used.

The management team assigned a Project Manager/Champion, **Social Services/Care Continuum employee, Jennifer Kahn**, to partner with NurseCare to define the specific needs of Sierra View. That was a key Critical Success Factor for this project. When asked about Choice 360, this is some of what Jennifer had to say: *“I love working with the Choice 360 Platform! I can remember when we used to stand at the fax machine with a stack of papers to send out for the skilled nursing placements. Now, because of Choice 360, one of the most time-consuming tasks, in my day has shrunk in half. The platform is easy and convenient to use.”*

And that coupled with the fact that Choice 360 is a web-based application without the typical IT rollout, the project moved along quickly and smoothly. Management kept the social worker on the project throughout the implementation to work through any kinks with NurseCare prior to the remainder of the team getting started.

Collaborating closely with a partner that Devon described as *“so responsive!”* was also key. *“If the PM or management team had a question, NurseCare was always immediately available and responsive “instantly dealing with the challenge,”* according to Devon.

Results and Conclusion

The workflow process has provided a significant improvement for the patients, the staff, and the post-acute care partners. Though not yet utilizing the survey functionality of Choice 360, *“we know that the families really like it”*. During COVID, the web-based solution with remote access by all family members or connected parties has been very well received.

Staff members have also received it very well. Even the Outpatient Palliative Care Team is using the system and it has been embraced by that team. According to Devon, *“it’s value goes beyond discharge planning.”*

Time management improvements and time savings have both occurred. There is no more need for manual faxing. Phone calls between the hospital and rehab partners have been dramatically reduced.

Devon stated that ***“post-acute care partners have confidence in the process now and they love the ability to refer to documented workflows. It’s all documented!”***

When asked about the relationship with NurseCare Devon enthusiastically responded with ***“NurseCare is not a vendor. NurseCare is a partner! I have worked with many vendors through the years and none of them were the kind of partner NurseCare has been. I have never experienced this type of relationship! I couldn’t be any prouder of being part of what we have accomplished together!”***

Beyond Choice 360, NurseCare and Devon are working on additional fresh ideas together to further innovate for Sierra View Medical Center.

Devon’s concluding advice was, ***“healthcare providers should not be afraid of collaborating with vendors that are not as established as an Epic or Cerner. They just must find the right partners. As healthcare providers we need to not be afraid to innovate and get involved with innovative companies as partners.”***