

Insight on Communications

A New Approach at Uvalde Memorial Hospital

Today's hospital administrators are tasked with not only providing excellent medical services to their communities, but also creating efficient and rewarding work environments for their staff. As part of this effort, hospital management needs to find continuous ways to improve communications as part of their everyday practice to help staff be more connected to each other and more in tune with the organization's goals.

To address the need for improved patient safety and education for its staff, one hospital in Texas took a new approach to its communication strategy that has enabled its education department to revolutionize how staff stay informed of training initiatives, departmental news, policies, and other daily updates.

Uvalde Memorial Hospital, located in southwest Texas, provides a wide range of emergency and long-term healthcare services to a five-county region of approximately 45,000 residents. Founded in 1928, the hospital continues to receive ongoing recognition for quality care, including top honors in patient satisfaction.

Offering the latest in medical technology is paramount to the hospital. This emphasis extends to the hospital's education department that implemented a new desktop communication technology to address the need for improved staff education and communications. "Our traditional method of internal communication was with pagers, e-mail, and fliers," says Pauline Garcia, BSN, RN, IBCLC, and clinical educator at Uvalde Memorial Hospital. "Like many organizations, e-mail can be troublesome as a communication tool, as it is easy to get overloaded with messages. We saw this new technology as a way to be current with our information in a way that would cut through the clutter of traditional tools and be more impactful."

Interactive Messages

The new desktop messaging system, eScreenz, is an enterprise solution that enables all designated staff computers to receive and display news and other information in a slide show format using an interactive viewer. Each staff member can access slide show messages as their schedule permits. The site administrator creates hospital news and information using off-the-shelf solutions such as PowerPoint. Messages are then targeted to specific departments, personnel, or facilities. eScreenz has a built-in scheduling feature that allows messages to be distributed at specific times.

The power of the system is a patent-pending feature that enables



A Uvalde employee views a training slide on eScreenz.

messages to be hyperlinked, taking users directly to specific pages on an intranet, SharePoint site, website, or other designated file location. This enables administrators to be very precise in the information they send out – cross promoting their intranets or other resources with the desktop messaging software. Instead of sending out an e-mail to all users about a new page buried deep within the volumes of a corporate intranet, staff can be

alerted to specific information, such as a new training policy or HR document, and have immediate and direct access to supporting resources.

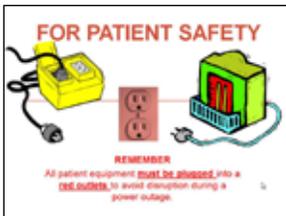
Multi-Departmental Acceptance

Internal response to the new technology has been positive throughout the organization. "We have found so many uses for it," said Garcia. "We never anticipated the overwhelming reaction we received and how fast the adoption of this technology moved throughout the hospital staff. Other department managers in Radiology, IT, HR, Safety and others have seen the value of eScreenz and are active contributors to the messages we distribute on a daily basis." The ability to get all employees at the hospital to read the same message creates consistency and clarity for the staff.

Applications for the new technology continue to be implemented, such as reinforcement of training initiatives, benefit updates, and everyday procedural reminders. “Our maintenance department sent out their holiday decorating safety guidelines that we were able to instruct people to post in their areas,” said Garcia. “Even accounting was able to use the system to communicate changes on payroll processes.”

Beyond the typical messages of hospital news and information, eScreenz has found additional uses. “We also use this system to get out the fun stuff as well,” said Garcia. This includes upcoming holiday events and staff activities.

A Plug for Safety



Ensuring that vital patient equipment has power even during an outage is a top priority. Uvalde, like other hospitals, is equipped with alternate power sources. EScreenz messages were created and sent out

to staff reminding them to plug designated equipment into red outlets, as these outlets are connected to independent power supplies during times of power outages.

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HR Program Awareness

Uvalde’s human resources department manages the many programs of the hospital including the annual sign-up for benefits enrollment. Using the new desktop messaging system, employees were instructed on meetings and sign-up procedures that helped the process go smoother not only for employees but for administrators, too.

Additionally, eScreenz is used to get employees more involved with various committees in the hospital and upcoming events, such as blood drives. “We recently had a blood drive, and using eScreenz, had an increase in our donations for this worthwhile event,” said Cindy Turner BSN, RN, clinical educator at Uvalde.

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Disaster Planning

In October of 2012, the east coast’s hurricane Sandy created significant national media coverage. “We thought this would be a good time for us to focus on helping our staff know how to prepare for such an event,” said Turner. So the incident command department created a training course on how employees can get their families prepared for such an emergency. Using eScreenz, training classes were promoted.

Smooth Transitions to New Enterprise Technologies

As part of Uvalde’s transition to become paperless and be in compliance with federal regulations for electronic documentation, the IT department recently upgraded the hospital’s electronic records systems. Using eScreenz, Garcia created an extensive, ongoing training campaign that provided screenshots with step-by-step reminders on how to use the new electronic records system. “eScreenz was the best way to communicate these new changes,” said Garcia. The power of the communication technology was that staff personnel would be on their computers using the new records system while viewing the eScreenz instructions. In essence, the screenshots and instructions became mini-manuals that people printed and used as a reference tool.

In addition, a new incident reporting system was recently installed at Uvalde. Staff was informed via eScreenz of the new system three weeks before the planned rollout. “To help promote the transition, we did continuous eScreenz messaging on how the new technology worked and how to use it,” said Garcia. “As a result of our messages, the transition went very smoothly once the rollout occurred.”

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An Employee views a procedural reminder on eScreenz at Uvalde Memorial Hospital.

Code Grey! Urgent Notification



The education department at Uvalde also uses the desktop messaging system to create instant alerts that interrupt staff PCs with messages of high importance such as external events that could impact staff and resources. “We recently had a multi-vehicle accident in the area that involved 10 people. This type of event or a weather related situation, such as a tornado, can cause strain on our efforts to respond to incoming casualties. So using our internal protocol, called ‘Code Grey,’ we can use the software’s Urgent Notification feature to alert our doctors, nurses, and technical staff of potential number of incoming patients,” said Garcia.

Conclusion

Today’s digital media, particularly photos, electronic forms, and social media create a sense of immediacy that people are used to. The expectation is that today’s corporate communications need to be current, visually impactful and more personal with new technologies that lend themselves to not only engaging employees, but also successfully adding value to the company’s bottom line through improved efficiencies. eScreenz does both. □
