The Essential Unification of Clinical Communication and Workflow
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Mobile and Clinical Communication’s
Coming of Age Moment
Introduction

The hospital environment is experiencing a dramatic acceleration of mobile device adoption alongside increased focus on healthcare value and care coordination. As a result, the clinical communication market is booming. Recent reports from KLAS (Secure Communication 2016) and Gartner (Market Guide for Clinical Communication and Collaboration) demonstrate how this category has matured from secure messaging stopgaps to enterprise-wide communication platforms—and the positive impact it’s having on care quality, care team effectiveness, and the patient experience.

And as it’s booming, the industry is also transforming for the better. Historically, clinical technologies were often adopted only to meet regulatory and compliance requirements. The result was increased fragmentation of data, siloed systems, and sub-optimal safety and care outcomes. These “fixes” have broken the flow of communication, not solved it. This prevailing challenge is made even more difficult by the fact that legacy communication systems don’t integrate meaningful clinical context.

Today, hospitals are making wide-scale investments in mobile technology. They are also beginning to understand that simply being able to talk, text, or send images does not guarantee better outcomes or improved patient safety. Secure texting requiring manual data entry and voice communications, without integrated clinical context, introduces new possibilities for error, negatively impacting efficiency and patient safety. There is a need for unified, collaborative communication that drives every touch point in the care plan workflow—all designed to achieve optimal patient outcomes.

This white paper examines the essential unification of clinical communication and clinical workflow and identifies three keys to achieving a transformative, non-disruptive, workflow-driven system for care team communication, collaboration, and care delivery.
The ideal solution starts with the ideal experience

To solve communication and collaboration challenges for both clinical and IT stakeholders, the right approach must begin with the ideal clinical workflow and care delivery experience, then work outward from there—not the other way around. Almost everything in healthcare is comprised of workflows—series of actions required to deliver care and generate intended outcomes. Communication should be considered the key to facilitating actions so that multiple workflows can be tied together to execute a care plan. To achieve true collaboration, communication and workflow must act as one. This will become ever more important as care delivery requirements evolve in the face of the ongoing regulatory shifts.

The impact of this approach is multifaceted: it not only transforms the experience of care by embedding meaningful patient, care team, and clinical context in communication threads, it also streamlines and enables workflow collaboration that mitigates the siloes created by EMRs and other legacy technologies.

As the healthcare provider becomes a real-time health system—a concept coined by Gartner—care teams must be supported by an alignment of real-time clinical data, communication, and workflow.

To best serve patients today and tomorrow, hospital leaders must view unified communications and collaboration as integral to point-of-care workflow experiences, not a decision about a piece of technology. This is a different, practical, and highly intuitive framework and promises better returns for care teams and patients.
The technology evolution:  
from standard to platform to workflow-driven

KLAS’s recently released 2016 Secure Communication Report¹ identified and differentiated two types of industry communication solution vendors: standard secure messaging vendors and platform secure communication vendors. The first vendor type offers basic building blocks for secure messaging. The second refers to an enterprise-wide communication platform that, in addition to providing all the basics, also expands into enterprise-grade offerings with basic integration into nurse call systems and middleware products. Yet many of those enterprise-grade communication platforms are still breaking the natural flow of clinical collaboration by missing the opportunity to be truly workflow-driven. Those “limited-view” approaches establish yet another stopgap solution.

Treating communications tasks as separate from workflow execution creates the same quandary as treating documentation as a separate task to care delivery. Unifying communication with workflow offers great opportunity for clinicians to be much more workflow-driven.

The only solution is one that breaks this cycle of stopgaps. Instead of skipping workflow entirely, like secure messaging vendors, or creating band-aid integrations like most platform secure communication vendors—it's time to unify communication with workflow from the ground up.
Three Keys to Unifying Communication with Workflow

1. **An enterprise platform that consolidates multiple user and stakeholder needs**

Hospitals are under daily pressure to implement communication systems that meet compliance standards. However, the pressure to meet requirements does not mean efficiency needs to be sacrificed. For example, requiring staff to use multiple and disparate technology platforms and tools increases inefficiencies and therefore adversely impacts patient care. And secure texting apps simply don’t go far enough; they remain interruptive and cannot provide care teams with the clinically contextual workflow they need.

The opposite of this is communication grounded in clinical workflow, from bedside medication administration to specimen collection to care team handoffs. Data is liberated from the EMR, directories, and other key systems to become visible and prioritized as part of care team conversations—on a familiar mobile platform. Through the delivery of relevant clinical data, unnecessary noise and fragmentation are eliminated.

Imagine, for example, the ability to scan patient medications, send pictures, activate voice communication, view/enter patient vitals, receive critical lab results, access nursing documentation, and receive mobile alerts—all in one app on a single device. These actions would follow a natural, non-disruptive flow that maps to the dynamic, real-time interactions between care teams and patients. It is a level of intuitive communication that cannot occur unless communications and workflows are unified across multiple user and systems needs.

Current systems have broken down care team communication rather than unifying them by inadvertently fragmenting the user experience.
Clinicians have devoted years of their lives to higher education and on-the-job experience, only to find themselves wrestling with new technologies that distract them, yet again, from taking expert care of their patients. They want complete and updated information in one place, filtered and prioritized for them when they need it, so they can do their best work.

Recent data shows that clinicians use, on average, 6.4 different devices a day.\(^2\) On any given day, they may have to switch to access different data across different devices, just to get a full view of the patient. The ideal clinical communication platform should be able to deliver the right information to the right device, in the right setting, to the right roles—and do it all without increasing IT’s burden to manage it all on the back end.

In the meantime, nurses face significant alarm fatigue. Research has demonstrated that 72% to 99% of clinical alarms are false, exposing clinicians to an overwhelming number of unnecessary alerts and risking desensitization.\(^3\) The Johns Hopkins Hospital revealed an average of 350 alarms per patient per day.

Clinical teams operate within this cacophony of notifications, alerts, and continuous mining of different data sources. A workflow-driven approach to communication will eliminate the cacophony, creating a single mobile source of seamless insight. Each conversation—whether over text, voice, group chat, or in-person—should be grounded in the real-time context of that patient and care team. When this happens, communication becomes the action-focused enabler of the workflow.
IT and compliance-friendly

Like clinical teams, IT has faced decades of technology implementations that have rarely delivered on the promise of easy integration and value. As technology is becoming more sophisticated and entire platforms are accessible as apps on mobile devices, IT teams should raise the bar on requirements for communication and workflow solutions.

This means their tool or platform of choice must be able to:

- Integrate with existing infrastructure, offering a meaningful path to consolidate existing fragmentation to a simple and effective solution
- Be configurable at the administrative layer to hospital policy and procedure requirements
- Be configurable to current workflows, with the ability to enable and optimize clinical workflows
- Address the needs of key clinical, IT, operations, and infrastructure stakeholders by offering robust interface functionality across all information repositories, including EMRs, laboratory, ADT, nurse call systems, alarm middleware, and more
- Enable a high rate of compliance within the care team by delivering a familiar consumer experience and meaningful context with every interaction

IT and compliance teams, who have spent decades implementing EMRs and other complex systems, are justifiably loath to embark on another “rip and replace” project.

“We are making clinicians more mobile and integrated and saving them time.” – PatientTouch solution reviewer for KLAS 2016 Secure Communication Report
Broad adoption of this caliber of enterprise communication and workflow solution is only possible if it meets the needs of a diverse group of healthcare end users. Productive connectivity across physicians, nurses, case managers, pharmacists, phlebotomists, rehab specialists, discharge nurses, transport coordinators, facility managers, and others is vital.

Yet connectivity alone isn’t enough. Giving each care team member access to real-time patient data is required for true clinical communication and collaboration.

An effective collaboration platform must be able to prioritize data for each care team member, while escalating messages to the right person with patient context embedded.

It’s crucial that each care team member has a prioritized mobile dashboard that shows the relevant information for him or her, seamlessly aligned with the clinical workflow, to drive action.

By eliminating non-relevant information and streamlining information sharing, it becomes easy to close the loop on critical tasks for improved care delivery. This is only possible through a solution that:

- Is dynamic and always up-to-date
- Is role- and assignment-based
- Eliminates “noise” by prioritizing data for each care team member, escalating messages, and finding the right team member to close the loop on critical tasks
Finally, the next generation of communication tools must support collaboration with providers outside a given organization in an adjacent care setting. Whether that’s an ambulatory facility, skilled nursing facility, home health environment, or long-term facility—the ability to successfully navigate care across the full continuum of a patient’s journey improves care delivery.

Clear, direct message escalation should include:

- Delivery and response confirmations that highlight the status of the need, enabling faster response
- The ability to redirect messages that haven’t been addressed, ensuring nothing falls through the cracks
- Alert routing based on an always-accurate care team directory

“PatientTouch Communications has significantly improved our ability to receive timely messages from various sources. Since the system is on handheld devices, the staff members have access all the time.”
- PatientTouch solution reviewer for KLAS 2016 Secure Communication Report
Choosing the Right Platform

A Checklist

Organizations looking to adopt a communications solution must decide which type of vendor will best meet their needs, both in the short term and long term. The checklist below will help you determine what type of vendor you’re working with—and how future-proofed you are. The following lists are technology blocks that build upon each other, adding increasing capabilities.

### Basic Building Blocks
Secure Messaging Basics

- Secure text
- Image sharing
- Desktop application
- Secure server storage, housed on premise or in the cloud

### Platform Building Blocks
(beyond Basic Building Blocks)
Secure communication platform with enterprise interfacing capabilities and a future-proofed, workflow-focused approach

- EMR interface
- ADT interface
- Nurse call interface
- Automation and escalation
- Phone system interface
- Message escalation
- Alerts and notifications
- Communication with outside organizations
- Scheduling
- Mass alerts
- Group chat
- Critical lab results interface

### Unified Workflow and Communication Solution
(beyond Platform Building Blocks)
Patient-centric, care team-enabled, workflow-driven approach

- Vital signs and data collection
- Patient data documentation
- Care interventions
- Workflow tools including medication administration, specimen collection, infant care, and blood product administration
- BPOC (barcoding at the point of care)
- Multimodal end points: ability to send communications to text, email, pagers, phones, voicemail, desktop applications, and more

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www.patientsafesolutions.com
A workflow-based, enterprise system that meets the point-by-point needs of every stakeholder

As the checklist shows, KLAS’s 2016 Secure Communication report defines the difference between standard and platform solutions, but we believe there’s a crucial third category being formed: that of workflow-driven communication.

In today’s age of value-based care and quality metrics, platform vendors are the new baseline. For true collaboration, today and into the future, hospitals are increasingly turning to this third approach of unifying their workflow and communication solutions into one holistic platform.

If you’re not sure where to start, sometimes it’s easiest to look for warning signs. When evaluating your partner in clinical communication, watch out for vendors who:

• Have primary experience in the secure texting space only
• Don’t display depth of experience with system integration and interoperability
• Don’t offer clinical workflow design and mapping as central to better care team collaboration
• Can’t deliver enterprise-level insights into operations
• Price the solution by care team user, limiting upside opportunity capture while nickel and diming, and subsequently devaluing the power of full collaboration

“Secure text messaging will not be a sustainable, stand-alone market in the context of care delivery... [and] not all secure texting vendors will be able to cross this chasm.”
- Gartner Market Guide for Clinical Communication and Collaboration
What This Means for Your Hospital

Every hospital and health system must continually evaluate the efficacy of their core communications systems, so their care teams can deliver the best possible quality, patient safety, and patient experience. Let’s look at three scenarios. Where do you fit today, and where do you want to be tomorrow?

Scenario 1: Operating with basic secure messaging

A 400-bed hospital in the Southeast is trying to manage HIPAA compliance by eliminating the personal texting and email communications between members of the care team. In the hopes of reducing this noise and improving security, they adopted a secure texting solution.

While the original goal of fully encrypted messaging was achieved, the side effects were worse than the initial problem. Implementation has disrupted the care team’s workflow, because care team members still need to access other systems to get the patient and clinical data they need. Therefore, adoption is not meeting expectations, causing consternation amongst the IT teams as they try to manage yet another siloed technology. The result has been even more inefficiency and unnecessary communication cycles, potential for errors in manual typing of data, and no measurable gains in quality, safety, or patient care.

Scenario 2: Operating on a secure communication platform

As more and more hospitals are realizing the limitations of secure messaging, they’re looking for platform solutions that integrate with other clinical systems at crucial stages in the clinical workflow. Such was the case with a regional health system in the Midwest that sought to implement an integrated secure communication platform with their CPOE process.
The hospital system’s ultimate aim was to achieve faster, more accurate responses to STAT orders, thereby advancing prompt patient care. While results have been positive, the platform still shows key disconnects between the ongoing clinical workflow and clinical communication, leaving care teams without all the prioritized data needed at any given moment.

They knew their inability to receive patient data and act on a prioritized workflow was especially problematic in urgent CPOE situations. They wondered how long they could continue applying stopgap methods and add-on solutions to their platform—without introducing new possibilities of error that could negatively impact efficiency and patient safety.

**Scenario 3: Unifying clinical communication and workflow**

Some hospitals are already on the journey to a complete clinical collaboration transformation that achieves care team efficiency and productivity; patient quality and safety; and enterprise system integration and cost savings.

A 370-bed hospital in the West decided to leave behind stopgap methods and adopt an enterprise approach that combines communication and workflow, all in one unified platform. The entire care team—including doctors, nurses, case managers, discharge managers, and more—swiftly adopted it because it used familiar technology on an iPhone or Android phone, and organized all texts, calls, alerts, labs, vitals, tasks, and reminders in a single prioritized inbox—to speed collaboration and decision making.

The hospital also adopted the platform’s workflow modules, fully automating point-of-care workflows including specimen collection, medication administration, infant care, blood product administration, assessments, rounding, interventions, and documentation—all available in the same interface used for communication and collaboration.

The platform offered interfacing and interoperability in real time from facility layouts, care team directories, roles and assignment schedules, patient lists, orders, critical result notifications, alerts, and EMR data.
Scenario 3 is just one example of a hospital that adopted PatientSafe’s PatientTouch® platform.

PatientTouch’s context-driven, clinical mobility platform is highlighted by customers for results across both communication and workflow.

### Communication Results
- 86% of users experience improved response times
- 86% of users feel more connected to the care team
- 79% of users see improved communication of patient information
- 67% of clinicians experience fewer interruptions
- 50% improvement in response time to rapid patient deterioration

### Workflow Results
- 97% average compliance across 80+ hospitals
- 60 minutes per nurse per shift saved on documentation and coordination
- 20% reduction in duplicative lab orders
- 15% decrease in STAT order to lab time
- 15% improvement in HCAHPS per medication education to patients

100% of PatientSafe customers would buy the PatientTouch Clinical Communications solution again and report that PatientSafe was part of their organization’s long-term plans. PatientSafe Solutions was the only platform vendor in the KLAS 2016 Secure Communication report to receive 100% satisfaction in both areas.†
Conclusion

The essential unification of clinical communication and workflow

Hospitals that remain focused on simply trying to secure their communications miss a critical opportunity. Those that ground their communication approach in workflow will begin transforming the delivery of care and bringing the focus back where it belongs—to the patient.

The artificial separation of communication from workflow must be resolved. This can’t be accomplished by bolting workflow onto a communication approach: it requires a fundamental rethinking of communication as an enabler that is inextricably linked with the entire clinical workflow.

This improved depth and breadth of interfacing means that functionality is robust and able to meet the needs of all users. The result? Higher adoption, better compliance and safer, more efficient care.
ABOUT PATIENTSAFE SOLUTIONS

PatientSafe Solutions (San Diego, California) obsesses over the experience of care to help care teams communicate and work together reliably and efficiently. PatientSafe delivers measurable safety and quality improvements through a mobile platform that extends an organization’s EMR, clinical, and communication infrastructure and fits seamlessly into care team workflows. The company’s context-driven PatientTouch® platform unifies communication with workflow by consolidating text, talk, alerts, EMR data, clinical workflows and customizable care interventions, all in one mobile app, on one device. For more than a decade, PatientTouch has helped clinicians both in and outside the hospital streamline care delivery, increase quality and lower costs.

For more information, please visit the company’s website at patientsafesolutions.com

ABOUT KLAS

KLAS is a research firm on a global mission to improve healthcare delivery by enabling providers to be heard and counted. Working with thousands of healthcare professionals and clinicians, KLAS gathers data on software, services, medical equipment, and infrastructure systems to deliver timely reports, trends, and statistical overviews. The research directly represents the provider voice and acts as a catalyst for improving vendor performance.

Follow KLAS on Twitter at https://twitter.com/KLASresearch
The following PatientTouch Clinical Communications customer reviews address input across six key categories: Functionality and Upgrades, Future Outlook, Implementation and Training, Relationship, Service and Support, and Technology.

Functionality and upgrades

“PatientTouch Communications tracks all of our statistics. In our first six months, we had over 300,000 instances of communication. Our phlebotomists have absolutely had their world changed in terms of workflow. They can be with one patient and get a text that tells them which room to go to next. In many cases, that room is close to where they are. Instead of going clear back to the lab to get their next assignment, they can quickly move from patient to patient. We did a satisfaction survey, and our nurses rated the system at over 85% for helping them work at the speed they need to for draws and things like that.”

“The system has secure texting and pulls in patient context; the physicians can be sure they are looking at the right patients. And when someone texts a physician, that text is tied to that patient and that patient’s room. That is cool. I think PatientSafe Solutions is going to fill a niche that badly needs to be filled.”

“We have integrated PatientTouch Communications very deeply into our organization...We are doing bedside medication administration, and we are also doing phlebotomy collection, which facilitates some incredible things with our blood bank. We also have voice and text communication happening internally for all of our nursing groups.”
Implementation and Training

“Our implementation was great. PatientSafe Solutions spent time with us before and after the go-live, and they brought a team on-site to provide support 24/7. The support after the go-live was great as well.”

Relationship

“The vendor has been fabulous to work with. The technology that they offer and how they offer it is really going to help us improve bedside nursing and clinical care. We are making clinicians more mobile and integrated and saving them time. I am really in love with the product.”

“PatientSafe Solutions has been great with all of the development and changes we have needed. ... They are truly one of the best companies that I have worked with. They are completely responsive. When we open a task, they get back to us very quickly. We never wait for days. We typically get a response in a couple of hours. ...They are truly customer focused. I feel like I am their only customer.”

Service and Support

“I feel like PatientSafe Solutions is always willing to work with us. They try to develop whatever it is that we need, whereas with our EMR vendor, we struggle sometimes.”

Technology

“PatientSafe Solutions does very well with delivering new technology that we need. Sometimes they actually are so good at having new technology and providing new options for us that I feel like what they have is a lot, but they keep up with the industry and what is expected.”

Future Look

“We will soon be going live with critical lab results and radiology results in PatientTouch Communications. Those are key pieces for us because we want our nurses to be able to get that information while they are walking around so that they don’t have to be at the nurse station to see that information.”
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