



Closing the Loop on Care.



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How Your Hospital Can Create a Culture of Accountability and Deliver Exceptional Patient Care

We have all experienced situations as consumers where a brand failed to live up to its promises, or a customer service representative failed to follow through and “close the loop” for us on a specific request. We’ve been disappointed, frustrated and dissatisfied with the quality of a product or service or endured a less than desirable purchasing experience. At the same time, we also have stories of brands that have surprised and delighted us with their responsiveness, dependability, high-quality goods and positive experiences.

It seems like any company that is providing a product or service to consumers would want to surprise and delight instead of frustrate and disappoint. So, why do most organizations fail to deliver? In many cases, it comes back to inefficient processes, staffing issues, breakdowns in communication or simply a lack of accountability within the organization.

As a hospital, you have the same challenges in front of you as any consumer good or service. Your customers (patients) have specific expectations (improved health + positive experience) and to successfully deliver, you must close the loop (ensuring care is delivered in a timely, effective and nurturing way).

In this ebook, we will share our vision for delivering exceptional patient care, while making a strong case for why your hospital should be focused on closing the care loop. We will discuss ways to improve processes and staffing, and specifically focus on how you can build a culture of accountability. We also will share secrets for making this change happen within your hallways.



BEFORE WE BEGIN

Before we fully define, and demonstrate the value of, closed loop care, let's look at what an open care loop looks like. It's easy to imagine, as it's the normal course of care at most facilities today. Consider this scenario:

A patient pushes the call button at his bedside. A staff member at the desk answers the patient to ask how she can help. The patient explains that he needs to use the bathroom. The staff member at this point either leaves her duties at the desk to search for someone who can help the patient, or she waits until someone walks by the desk because she's too busy to leave her station. As a third option, she might page overhead for assistance, which pumps additional noise into every patient room.

In our example, we'll assume the staff member has stopped a clinician who was passing by to assist with the patient. The clinician is not assigned to the specific room but says she can help. On her way to the patient's room, however, she gets sidetracked. Maybe a physician calls her into a room or a beeping IV pump gets her attention. In any event, despite her best intentions, she does not respond to the patient's need.

After waiting a while, the patient rings the bell again and/or a family member comes out to the desk to complain. This launches a second request for help, and the cycle begins again. Most likely, the patient will eventually get what he needs, but not in a timely or satisfactory manner. This also could be a safety concern. If the clinician takes too long to provide assistance, the patient may take matters into his own hands and try to make it to the bathroom unassisted.

This scenario repeats over and over again in hospitals across the country. Most providers are unable to make it better, and many don't even realize the severity of the problem. That's where a commitment to closed loop care and a culture of accountability come into play.



A BETTER WAY

Looking back at our example of an open care loop, let's examine what a closed loop might look like.

In a closed loop system of care, the same patient pushes the call button. The request is immediately routed to the most appropriate staff member (based on responsibilities, assignments and type of request). The request, staff response and the time the task is completed is recorded in the system. If the staff member fails to respond or complete the task within a pre-determined time frame, the system can "escalate" the request to the next caregiver in line.

Again, until a staff member completes the request, the system will continue to progress with escalations. Once a staff member enters the room and completes the request, it is recorded in the system and the request is closed. The patient and clinician experiences in a closed loop system are dramatically different. Clinicians are more efficient. Care teams are more effective. Requests are addressed much faster. There are no missed handoffs, no requests that slip through the cracks. Just as importantly, data produced by each encounter allows for the hospital to make strategic decisions and take action in terms of staffing, performance management and needed improvements for patient care.

VALUE OF A CLOSED LOOP SYSTEM

As we saw in our example of a closed loop system, there is tremendous value in improving your hospital's ability to create accountability for the care you provide. This value ranges from quality to safety to satisfaction and beyond. Consider the following specific value propositions:

▶ Tackling Care-Related Never Events

Pressure ulcers and falls are the two most costly categories of never events for hospitals. Purposeful Rounding has been shown to help alleviate both concerns. With a closed loop system, you can automate rounding and document activity, proving that rounds occurred regularly. Additionally, a closed loop system leads to faster response times, further limiting your exposure to falls and other safety concerns.

▶ Engaging and Developing Clinical Staff

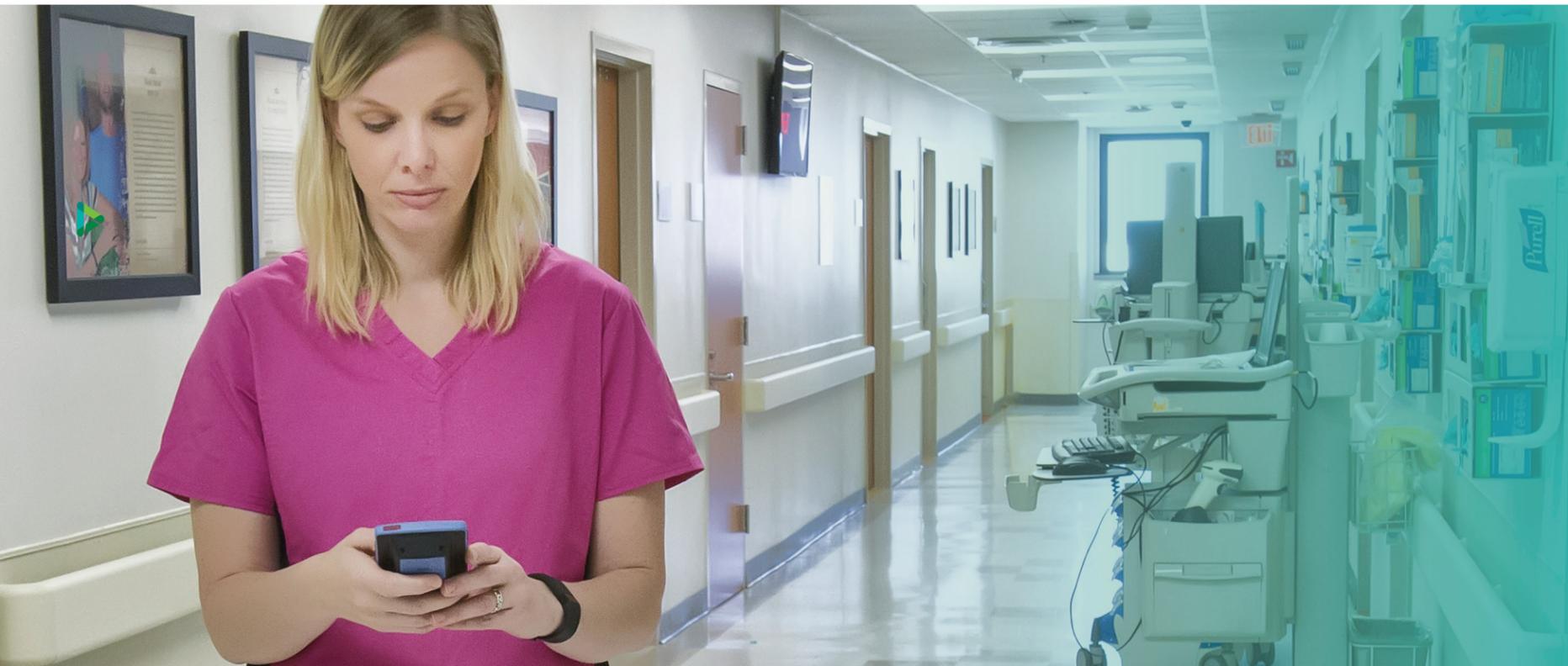
A closed loop system helps you better identify and reward top performers, while helping struggling staff members improve through additional training and support. You also can more efficiently and effectively leverage staff and use them based on their appropriate roles and skills. A closed loop system will also help staff improve their organizational and time management skills. All of this will make it easier for you to recruit and retain the best and brightest while saving you time and expense related to staff turnover.

▶ Effectively Addressing Service Recovery

Through the data generated by a closed loop system, you have credible and tangible information to use for service recovery as you speak with families. Take for example a family member who is unable to be with a patient around the clock. Having the ability to document many of the care tasks that were performed in his or her absence would help mitigate situations where there was a perception that the patient was not being properly cared for at all times.

▶ Bolstering the Bottom Line

Through a combination of enhanced safety, increased patient satisfaction and loyalty and improved care, your hospital will be saving money while boosting its income when deploying a closed loop system. Think of the collective impact from enhancing your ability to differentiate your hospital, optimizing your staffing mix and increasing your Medicare reimbursements through improved performance.



Increasing Patient Satisfaction and Loyalty

In a closed loop system, patients are more satisfied, HCAHP scores are better and loyalty is higher. When their needs are met in a timely fashion, and they feel like they have been heard and taken care of, patients are much more likely to come back for their next healthcare need and positively promote your facility to others.

Anatomy of a Closed Loop System

(and a Culture of Accountability)

So what does a Closed Loop System look like? The diagram to the right highlights the key components of accountable care delivery. We will be touching on these in the following section.



CLOSING THE LOOP

If your hospital has decided that a closed loop system is important enough to invest in, where do you start? How do you ensure success? After all, change like this is never easy. Let's discuss a few keys to establishing a true culture of accountability, fueled by a closed loop approach to patient care.



Shove the status quo.

In healthcare, there is a powerful undercurrent that says, "This is how we've always done things around here." This mentality stifles innovation and advancement. It will be alive and well if you choose to pursue a culture of accountability. There will be resistance from all levels within the organization. There will be compelling arguments made for why change is not necessary.

The status quo will be one of the most significant points of contention and hardest to move obstacles in your progression toward smarter patient care. That means you have to proactively attack it head on and send a strong message to your organization that the way things have been done is no longer adequate or appropriate to fuel your long-term viability as a provider.



Admit you might have a problem.

Comparable to status quo thinking, many hospitals don't even realize the severity of their problems. It's easy to rationalize and tell yourself, "Patients always complain. That's just the way it is." It's easy to minimize the severity of the issues you face in areas such as staffing, workflow, leveraging data and patient feedback. It's easy to experience disconnects between cause and effect for quality or safety issues.

After all, you've likely never had the tools or information to clearly see your deficiencies, the impact of them and the most critical issues you need to improve. Chances are, you have a problem. Maybe several. Being open to discovering what those might be and taking steps to bring deeper insight into your hospital is a powerful step. It can also be a very difficult step in your journey, but you have to take it.

For example, one hospital decided to look more closely at alarms in their facility, taking a data-driven approach for their evaluation. They uncovered a much bigger problem than they ever knew they had. Hundreds of alerts were being unnecessarily triggered by pulse ox alarms and creating significant alarm fatigue among staff. Without systematically reviewing their performance, the hospital would have minimized their issue and missed a big opportunity for improvement.



Keep an open mind

For some, closed loop care seems unattainable. In their current frenetic environment, they see no way for messages to be delivered to appropriate staff in a timely manner let alone confirm care was delivered. They just see their environment, the way healthcare has always been... they can't visualize any other way. They don't see a logical pathway to a place where staff could be more efficient and organized and patients more satisfied.

For others, there is some workflow, staffing mix or other process or procedure that would simply prevent this type of change from occurring. Instead of seeing new possibilities, some aren't as open as they need to be to reorganize workflow and team assignments so that they keep what's working and throw away the rest. The result is a mistake of seeing things myopically.



Paint the bigger picture

While most leaders and clinicians would readily admit that a closed loop system and a culture of accountability could bring tremendous value, these efforts can get lost in a sea of seemingly competitive priorities. Big challenges such as hospital budget, quality of care, etc. all quickly trump this body of work and are perceived as more important and/or more urgent.

The truth of the matter is that an effective approach to closed loop care and a strong culture of accountability can have a halo effect on your hospital's larger concerns. They strengthen your ability to deliver quality care. They help you operate more efficiently. They create revenue opportunities from better clinical outcomes, higher satisfaction scores and referrals from patients who have positive experiences with your facility and team. Helping everyone in your organization understand the value a closed loop system can offer is the best way to build momentum and ensure adoption. Until someone makes it a priority and becomes the evangelist for making it a reality, it will never get the love and attention it needs to flourish.



Know where you want to go.

The end goal of closed loop care is proactive, and eventually, predictive care. You must keep that front and center as you build out your approach to closed loop care and support it with a culture of accountability. That means setting a clear path with a holistic strategic plan.

In our interactive guide to the Smart Patient Room of the Future, we discussed how the key to leveraging data to drive better decisions comes from clarity about what you are trying to accomplish, specificity around

what you can measure and control, and implementing the proper tools to make it happen. This is true for the broader discussion of closed loop care. Focus. Clarity. Specificity. These are the necessary ingredients to jumpstart your efforts.



Start from the top

Accountability starts from the top. Leaders have to hold themselves accountable first, then staff. A closed loop system means more work if you don't already hold staff accountable, so be sure this is what you want.

Reports and data that remove subjectivity from how employees' performance is being viewed can be extremely valuable. It can ensure that the same rules apply to everyone and that top performers are rewarded. Imagine how caregivers would perform if they knew they would be held to the same standards as their peers—and that all will be treated fairly.

But leaders who fail to effectively use that data to transform the culture run the risk of wrecking morale. In the end, no piece of technology, or process, can fix the accountability issue. Clinical leaders have to make it work, and prioritize it within their organization.



Stick to your commitment

Once you decide to go for it, you have to stay with it. This means training, ongoing communication, investment in the right technology and establishing it as a clear, long-term priority for your organization. Too often, major change initiatives fail because staff members don't see them as truly important for themselves and the organization.

In an accountable environment, everyone is on the same page. It's clearly understood that accountability is part of the organization's core, and a key part of how the team operates. To this end, low performers should be consistently coached and work to co-develop plans for improvement with their managers. Data should be used to keep middle and high performers rewarded and engaged. Appropriate tools and support should be available to all team members.

Consistent communication and sticking to your commitment grows even more important over time. At first, there will likely be a lot of energy behind building this culture. But as time progresses, it will be easy for accountability to lose its power as a term. Think about initiatives for things such as hand washing and how quickly posted signs blend into the background and go unnoticed. The same can happen to your culture of accountability, unless you frequently re-focus your organization on it.



Trade out your rear view for a clear view.

Instead of relying on traditional methods for collecting feedback that typically have lengthy lag times for reporting, such as satisfaction surveys, leverage real-time patient feedback to drive health system performance improvement.

According to TruthPoint, a technology company specializing in patient experience, quality, and safety performance improvement solutions, patient surveys do a great job of providing insight, but these insights come weeks or even months after patient care has been delivered. With real-time patient feedback, you have the ability to gain rapid insight to see what's right in front of you. This feedback acts as a lead measure of success and empowers front line teams with timely and targeted feedback that can be used to improve and sustain performance in a closed loop system.

Closed loop care is possible, and the value is immense.

Insight into what happens at the bedside is more important than ever, both in terms of patient safety and satisfaction. No amount of policy and training can ensure that proper procedure is followed every single time. But integrating sound policies, comprehensive training, an unwavering commitment to accountability and innovative technology that captures workflow can result in unprecedented change.

In the end, you have to ask yourself a few questions. Are you open, or are you closed? Is accountability real for you, or just lip service? Do you have a plan for change, or are you comfortable doing things the way they have always been done? How you answer these questions will dictate not only the quality of care you provide to patients, but the long-term viability of your organization. Make sure you have the right response.



info@amplionalert.com
www.amplionalert.com