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Using self-service kiosks with your check-in staff

The right combination for higher patient care.

By Jeri Pack

I have been in healthcare for over 30 years, and I have seen first-hand how sick people often experience unnecessary anxiety during check-in. I also have learned how healthcare organizations may create unneeded work and stress due to their poor registration processes and the inefficient documentation trail that's produced.

These hassles have been eliminated at Montgomery Cancer Center where we have implemented several self-registration kiosks.

Before our kiosks were in place, like at most other facilities, patients got registered, but they did not go through the process in the timely and efficient fashion that they should. We had, on average, 450 patients a day. To funnel that many people through one portal, or one type of intake area, was almost physically impossible. When you consider that these patients were suffering from cancer and they were coming to us for things like checkups, blood work and infusions, it's easy to imagine that we observed numerous frustrations for our patients and staff but we could not create a meaningful solution on our own. We needed a technology set that we did not know was even in our market at the time. We wanted to find a system that was easy to use, could accurately identify and verify incoming patients, but also be capable of utilizing separate billing platforms and a high volume of duplicate medical records and corporate numbers. Looking back, our expectations were very high because our patients are so important to us. Looking forward as we use the self-registration kiosks that Clearwave developed with their vendor partners, I am so excited about the new level of attention our patients will receive for years to come.

You would not think this type of technology would lend itself to cancer patients, especially given the high volume we treat, but just the opposite is true. The average age of the patients at our cancer center is 62.5. Their average check-in time at the kiosk is just over two minutes. A registrar can't work that fast with a high level of accuracy, but our kiosks can. Each kiosk can automatically identify our patients through their driver's licenses, and their names, social security numbers and dates of birth are all instantly recognized and recorded. The kiosks identify the most current physical addresses, and they even

collect the email addresses of our patients as well. They have helped the cancer center collect more accurate demographic information. We are collecting 38 percent more email addresses at the kiosk as compared to the old manual registration process.

In addition to the high ease of use for our patients, the self-check-in kiosks have also helped our staff to reduce their involvement with large and time-consuming activities, such as dealing with duplicate records. At our center, we have a high volume of duplicate medical records and duplicate corporate numbers. That's a big deal for any facility like ours because a master patient index (MPI) cleanup can cost in excess of \$1 million. Our kiosks require nowhere near that level of expense, and they do a wonderful job with these tasks.

It is so important to have this level of automation because we feel strongly that our patients should be treated with dignity and respect. They need staff members that are schooled in customer service to describe our processes and to answer their questions, not impersonal note-takers who spend most of their time dealing with forms. There is not one location within our system that we don't have a human registrar that greets a patient after they check-in via a kiosk. Because our kiosks have cut down on the time used during patient check-in, our staff members have more opportunities to interact more calmly and caringly with our patients. Our kiosks do not replace staff. They enhance what they can do, and they enable us to provide new services such as true financial counseling on the front end. I am rewriting our charity and discount policies so that I may retrain all of our registration staff in this direction. We think this type of counseling is vital and that it will take our customer service to a whole new level.

All of these things did not happen overnight, and a great many people and companies were involved. You will hear many of these individuals throughout this Living Case Study explain the technical details involved with this implementation, and I am confident you will be in awe of their work. But as a healthcare veteran, I have to say that my biggest thrill has been seeing how excited our staff is to come to work. Everyone genuinely believes that we can now take some of our dreams for better patient care and, using our new kiosks, turn them into realities.

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