

White Paper

Healthcare Service Desk

Efficiently Meeting The Increasing Demands Of The Healthcare IT Service Desk

An Overburdened Hospital Service Desk Must Deal With A Variety Of Issues

The 2013 HDI (Help Desk Institute) Support Center Practices & Salary Report found that 75% of healthcare support centers have seen an increase in ticket volume over the last year.¹ Hospital IT Departments across the country are stretched to their limits implementing new technologies and EHR systems, as well as dealing with security and privacy issues while struggling with government mandates like ICD-10. In addition, support calls to hospital Service Desks are increasing, especially from clinicians, due to complicated technologies deployed across the organization.

75% of healthcare support centers have seen an increase in ticket volume over the last year.¹

Often these support centers lack a proven structure for call management and prioritization, with calls for assistance arriving via multiple channels, including auto logging, phone and voice mail, email, chat, fax, mobile app, social media, or walk-up, as well as other means.

Issues hospital Service Desks typically contend with on a daily basis:²

- 1 Calls lack clarity, not clearly defining the problem
- 2 Calls are lost or dropped
- 3 Service Desk staff does not realize the importance or urgency of a support call
- 4 Calls are not prioritized properly
- 5 Service Desk personnel don't know who is responsible for various areas of operation
- 6 The Service Desk gets overwhelmed with calls that could be prevented

Without a structured process for receiving, prioritizing and properly assigning support calls for efficient workflow, the result is often chaotic and unmanageable for an already overworked Service Desk staff.

Escalating costs are another critical issue facing hospital Service Desks. The HDI Support Center survey found 59% of hospitals provide 24-hour support.³ This can become extremely expensive, especially when professionals with clinical expertise are used for higher levels of service. The HDI Survey provides some insight on the cost of various levels of support per request. Although the report includes all industries, hospitals comprised approximately 12.1% of respondents:

National Average Ticket Cost by Service Level⁴

Cost* Per Ticket by Level		
Level 1 Support	-	\$15
Level 2 Support	-	\$22
Desktop Support	-	\$23
Level 3 Support	-	\$30

** Median fully-burdened cost for the support center, per ticket resolved by each level (US data only)*

Given that a typical hospital Service Desk handles thousands of calls over the course of a year, costs can quickly become a concern. Consequently, Service Desks are often the target of budget cuts. The 2014 HIMSS Workforce Survey identified the Help Desk category as the second most common area in healthcare IT targeted for layoffs.⁵

It is interesting to note that this same survey identified the Help Desk as one of the top areas with the most new hires and in the top four areas where providers plan to hire,⁶ indicating these critical support positions may experience turnover more frequently than other areas.

Constant turnover in key Service Desk positions leads to reductions in service quality.

Lack of knowledge in clinical areas is also an ongoing problem. With sophisticated new EHRs and other complex systems in use throughout the hospital, the need to support physicians and other clinical staff has dramatically increased. Effectively servicing these clinical users who need an immediate resolution requires a different skill set than traditional IT support. Specialized knowledge of clinical operations, HIPAA requirements, and a wide range of EHRs and their various modules is needed. Service Desk staff must also understand the importance of the request for help and the need to resolve the issue quickly and accurately with empathy for the clinician who may be in the middle of treating a patient. With IT departments already overwhelmed, supporting these urgent clinical requests can be a problem. Additionally, finding qualified IT personnel with a strong clinical background often presents a challenge.

The Impact of a Negative Service Desk Experience

When mistakes are made in an organization, cost considerations are usually the first thing that comes to mind. But in the case of the hospital Service Desk, much more than money is at stake when a user has a negative experience. Since physicians and the entire care team are now relying on advanced technologies to provide patient care 24/7/365, these complex systems are now “mission critical” to the organization and an integral component of delivering quality care. What are the ramifications when a physician is treating a patient and has trouble accessing the patient’s records? What about when a nurse administers a patient’s medicine, but can’t get the EHR to correctly enter the information? What happens when an admitting clerk can’t get the needed application to work while the patient is sitting across from her? Not only does the workflow come to a screeching halt, but patient care is dramatically impacted as well. When these problems are not solved quickly and accurately, frustration grows among the entire hospital staff, and confidence is lost in the Service Desk. Ongoing negative experiences can fuel a high level of dissatisfaction, creating a negative perception that can impact the entire department and support for future IT initiatives.

Outsourcing To A Healthcare IT Expert: An Efficient Solution For The Hospital Service Desk

Given the complexities and costs involved in running an effective Service Desk, many hospitals are choosing to outsource this critical function, keeping their IT staff more focused on their core mission of supporting the necessary IT products and services required for the delivery of quality care. Outsourcing is a strategy that is being widely embraced by healthcare providers, with the 2014 HIMSS Workforce Survey finding that fully three-quarters of the provider respondents outsourced some of their IT staffing needs in 2014 rather than directly hiring personnel.⁷

A 2012 survey conducted by Modern Healthcare Insights found that 27% of the survey respondents outsourced their Help Desk, and that Help Desk services were among the top five IT services outsourced that year by providers.⁸

27% of the survey respondents outsourced their Help Desk

Outsourcing the Service Desk can provide significant advantages to hospitals, particularly if the vendor specializes in healthcare IT. Companies who deal only with healthcare have an unparalleled depth of knowledge of all phases of hospital operations. These healthcare specialists understand hospital workflow and can design and implement the most efficient policies, processes and technologies for providing support. Significant cost savings can be realized, while eliminating the burden of handling 24/7/365 staffing and the personnel hassles that come with it.

Outsourcing is the ideal answer for many healthcare organizations with overburdened IT Departments who want to ensure a high level of support from their Service Desk. Freed of handling this complex task, IT staff can direct their energies to core initiatives where their talents are best used.

Outsourcing is the ideal answer for many healthcare organizations

Conclusion

Healthcare organizations today must seek efficient, cost-effective ways to manage the Service Desk, as the need for support is dramatically increasing driven by complex technologies deployed across the organization that impact virtually every aspect of providing quality care.

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