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A nurse call system, sometimes referred to as a “call bell” system, provides a primary means of communication between patients and nurses. Historically, systems were designed for a single method of patient-to-nurse communication, where the patient pushed a button that triggered a call light and generated a tone at the nurse’s desk. Over the years, nurse call system technology has evolved from stand-alone, fairly simplistic systems to robust, integrated platforms with voice communications. Today, a nurse call system serves as the core component of what has come to be known as a healthcare communications platform.

A healthcare communications platform incorporates many of the technological advances seen in other industries into an integrated system for staff and patients. What follows is a brief overview of major technologies and trends that are driving a movement toward more highly capable and integrated healthcare communication solutions that can help to enhance staff productivity and patient satisfaction.

Text Messaging

Most nurse call systems today utilize some form of text messaging. Text messaging allows a specific patient request to be sent directly to the wireless device of the assigned caregiver. This technology can give the caregiver advance notice of a patient’s needs, thereby helping to provide a more effective response. A quality messaging system, in the hands of a well-trained staff, is an effective means of dispatching the appropriate caregivers who can best respond to a patient’s specific needs.

Integration with Wireless Phones

One of the most noteworthy trends is the integration of nurse call systems with wireless phones, using SIP and VoIP technologies. In a healthcare setting, a wireless phone’s most important feature is its ability to display a text message. At the same time, it also enables caregivers to speak directly with patients. While there are clear benefits to the ability for staff to speak with patients, some disadvantages must also be considered, such as the interruption a ringing phone may cause an already busy nurse or the extra noise generated by additional phone conversations. The ultimate benefit of a wireless phone system is the time savings that results from quicker communication among staff and doctors. This efficiency in communication contrasts sharply with the days of old, when nurses had to be at the nurse’s desk to speak with a doctor about an order or to answer a question.

Access to Nurse Call System Data

With the advent of integrated healthcare communications technology, an increasing number of facilities allow nurse managers to access nurse call system data from their offices or other remote computers. This enables managers to make staff-to-patient assignments, review report data, send text messages to staff, and view patient call activity. Other departments not typically associated with nurse call are also benefitting from the ability to remotely access nurse call system information. For example, the housekeeping department can be given an immediate view of “bed clean/dirty” status – and use that information to respond quickly to a need to prepare beds and rooms for new patients.

Continuing Technology Evolution

Healthcare communications technology is now keeping pace with advancements in other industries. The expectation is that the communications platform will continue to evolve, to include more departments, and to help healthcare institutions better serve the needs of patients and staff. That’s not a simple task, but help can be found by working collaboratively with a healthcare communications systems integrator. An integrator can guide you through the all-important planning process. Thoughtful planning, for both short- and long-term needs, can be the key to melding seemingly disparate communications systems into a cohesive, productive platform. And with a dependable, flexible nurse call system as the core component of the solution, the integration options seem endless.



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