Seven Big Problems with Using Pagers in Healthcare

Pagers have many faults, not least is their inefficiency, which costs the average hospital $1.75 M per year and impedes critical clinical workflows. We have identified seven main issues that clearly demonstrate the unreliability and inefficiency of pagers that hold healthcare innovation back.

Pagers are not encrypted

Most doctors don't realize that pagers do not provide encrypted communications. Without encryption, remaining HIPAA compliant is extremely difficult in a healthcare setting. Communication on pagers must be very limited and non-descriptive so that doctors do not violate HIPAA regulations.

To ensure all doctor-to-hospital communications meet HIPAA requirements, digital exchanges must:

- Require a sign-in process

- Have encrypted messaging

- Have delivery & read receipts

- Have date & time stamps on messages

- Enable customizable message retention & remote wiping

- Use only a specified contact list

Pagers might offer one or two of these abilities, but none have all 6 requirements. There's a significant cost associated with HIPAA violations, as was underlined in the case of Catholic Health Care Services which was fined $650K for failing to have patient information encrypted and password-protected.

Pagers can be hacked

In an upcoming study, OnPage will detail how a U.S. hospital had its pager communication hacked and read by outside parties. As a result of this hack:

- The hospital had to register the violation with the Department of Human Health Services

- The hospital had to inform *all* parties who had their information exposed

- The hospital had to invest in new technology to ensure HIPAA compliance

Pagers have only high-priority pages

Pagers typically don't have low vs. high-priority messaging. So rather than differentiating between a prescription refill and a patient admission, all pages sound the same and the difference between these two circumstances is unnoticeable.

Pagers have a limited range

Outside of a few blocks neighboring a hospital, a pager often won't receive its intended page. So, if a doctor or nurse is at home or taking care of business away from the hospital, they may not get their pages. It doesn't take much imagination to realize that there is an important patient impact here from healthcare providers not getting their messages.

Furthermore, there is limited investment today in the radio towers which pagers rely upon. The maintenance of paging infrastructure is decreasing. As such, the ability of pagers to continue to provide support for physicians' needs is decreasing.

Additionally, pagers are unable to continue to alert the physician if the page is not immediately picked up. There is no way for the paging facility to know if the page has been received. As a result, physicians frequently report that they have missed pages. According to Emory University, users report **missing pages** on pagers 97% more often than they report missing pages on smartphones.

Pagers don't enable two-way communication

Imagine you had a one-way telephone where you could only make calls but not receive them. If you have this image firmly planted in your mind, then you have a concept of the traditional pager, which can only receive pages but not initiate further communication. In hospitals in general, text messaging is not allowed.

Pagers cannot escalate alerts

As noted above, not all pages are created equal. But for pages that are critical, there is frequently the need to bring in expertise or assistance from other professionals. Traditional pagers don't permit this level of communication to occur. Instead, healthcare workers need to rely on their smartphones to make calls as their pagers do not allow this level of communication.

Furthermore, if the physician who is alerted is unable to answer the page, traditional pagers don't enable escalation of the alert to the next person on call.

Pagers don't allow attachments

Successful healthcare diagnoses and effective treatments typically require test results and imaging. However, traditional pagers are incapable of facilitating this necessary level of communication. Instead, you are left with what you see on the screen of your pager. And that information, my friend, isn't much.

Conclusion

These reasons only begin to tell the story of the inadequacies of pagers. They don't even address the cost to patients and their families of wasted time in getting care to the individual in need.

That's why so many hospitals rely on OnPage's HIPAA compliant clinical communication and collaboration solution!

Care teams can seamlessly connect with on-call providers and continue their collaboration right from the app.

Plus, with robust EHR integrations, teams heighten their situational awareness and provide better patient care.

For more information on how to ensure HIPAA-compliant collaboration for your team:

Visit the OnPage website at https://www.OnPage.com or call us at 781-916-0040.