



EDUCATING CIOs ON PAGER REPLACEMENT STRATEGIES



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Gartner research recently wrote that pagers are in their last act of a 3 Act play. According to the research house,

By 2023, 50% of all pagers in use within U.S. healthcare providers will be replaced by smartphones or wearables ...Pagers are slowly giving way to smartphones as traditional paging use cases skew in favor of more robust bidirectional communication requirements.

The smartphones Gartner describes as having the capacity to replace pagers are specifically those that provide clinical communication and collaboration (CC&C) platforms and, through unique applications, have the ability to exchange information in multiple fashions. It is these types of smartphones that CIOs, will need in order to ensure their healthcare institutions have the ability to exchange secure messages as well as improve workflow.

Yet if pagers are on their way out, then why does anything need to be done? Can't we let history take its course? The problem with allowing this pace of change to be adopted is that it will engender much unnecessary chaos and does not provide CIOs with any sense of what best practices to follow. The real question is not, how to leave pagers, but rather how to *transition from pagers*. It is neither feasible nor advisable to end pager use without providing a road map for the path forward.

The goal of this white paper is to highlight the challenges that abandoning pagers pose as well as how CIOs can work to transition away and towards CC&C. Specifically, this whitepaper will look at:

- Challenges of leaving pagers
- What CIOs need as part of their transition strategy
- What smartphones need to provide to ensure successful transitions

CHALLENGES OF LEAVING PAGERS

In spite of all the problems caused by pagers and the increased use of smartphones, eliminating pager use is not simple. Pagers have been integral to healthcare for over 60 years. Pagers are still intertwined with legacy workflows and communications. This history with pagers means that healthcare CIOs see them in many cases as an embedded technology that is hard to eliminate.

Today, many physicians receive alerts on their pagers and use their smartphones to return calls or collaborate on a patient. While clinicians want to converge onto a single device, they are somewhat at the mercy of inertia when it comes to using pagers. Although they might want to improve workflows and rely solely on smartphones, their hospital organization and CIOs are not on the same page.

In essence, pagers are notification devices rather than collaboration tools. As healthcare increasingly desires to focus on improving collaboration and communications, moving away from pagers is increasingly important. CIOs however need to have a strong understanding of their legacy environment before choosing the solution that they believe will carry their organization into the future.

WHAT CIOs NEED TO LOOK FOR

CIOs already have a leg up on transitioning from pagers to smartphones as much of their staff is already using either an iPhone or Android. Recent statistics cite that 85% of physicians and 70% of nurses use smartphones as part of their care for patients. Pagers have, in part, been replaced by smartphones as physicians look for ways to improve their productivity and ability to communicate. Physicians' championing of smartphones has added to the pressure and made it increasingly difficult to justify pager use as providers require robust communications methods.

Furthermore, as CIOs look to improve workflow and thus efficiency, they soon realize that pagers provide few solutions in these areas. So, when CIOs look to switch to CC&C platforms, they must keep in mind the solutions and workflows which pagers are currently providing and make sure that the solutions they embrace can take over these tasks. CIOs can find this level of technology by looking at smartphone apps that lead the market in terms of their sophistication and robustness.

Specifically, CIOs should look to CC&C solutions that provide:

1) Robust, bi-directional message communications

One of the major drawbacks of pagers is that they do not enable message recipients to respond to the messages they receive. Instead, recipients receive the message on a pager and then must follow up with a phone call on their smartphone. At a minimum, the smartphone-based alternative which CIOs choose

needs to enable two-way messaging. Preferably, the application CIOs choose will also enable calling from the app to facilitate workflows.

2) Privacy, security and HIPAA compliance devices used by smartphones

Pagers are notorious for not providing any encryption or security for the messages exchanged on them. This is a significant violation of HIPAA if the message contains any personal or identifiable patient information. The solution which CIOs adopt needs to ensure encryption of the data at rest and in transit. This is a key part of current encryption standards and is a requirement of all HIPAA-secure communications.

3) Care coordination

Given that a major problem with pagers is that they impede effective collaboration, the smartphone solution CIOs adopt needs to enable healthcare providers to exchange documents, images, pdfs, voice messages, health records and any relevant information that can assist in improving the care of the patient.

4) Persistent alerting

One of the many challenges of pagers is that they alert the recipient once. So, if the recipient doesn't hear the alert the sender must try to page them again. This alerting is a true impediment to workflow and challenges the ability of care providers to give their patients the care and consultation they need. Ideally, the solution CIOs engage should persistently alert the recipient until the alert is acknowledged. Of equal importance, the solution needs to provide multiple ways to contact the recipient. In addition to alerts, the pager alternative needs to enable alerts through SMS, phone call and email to enable that all of the recipient's digital bases are covered.

5) On-call management

Any smartphone application that is embraced as an alternative to pagers needs to ensure there is robust capabilities for on-call management. The solution needs to provide a way to enter on-call schedules so that when a nurse or colleague needs the on-call radiologist or neurologist, they do not need to waste time running to the nurse's station to find out who is on-call.

A much better solution is provided by enabling alerting to a given on-call group that is digitally updated. That way, the physician or nurse never needs to know who is on-call. Instead, they simply need to page "on-call radiologist" and know that their message will go directly to the radiologist on-call.

6) Presence information

An additional challenge provided by pagers is that they do not enable the user to know if their colleagues are logged onto the smartphone application or not. By providing users of the application with "presence information" on their colleagues, much of the confusion is avoided.

7) Support for the device and technology when technology challenges arise

A persistent challenge for pager users is that when the pager breaks, they are left without a mode for alerting. Additionally, there is typically not someone they can call when their pager breaks. They simply need to get a new one.

Smartphones however are more robust than pagers. Additionally, if there are problems with the smartphone clinical communications platform, the ideal platform will provide 24x7 support for end-users.

8) Training for adopting the alternative solution

To ensure robust adoption of the clinical communications solution, CIOs should make sure the clinical communications provider enables training and workshops to educate users on how to use the product and proceed when problems arise. If training is not provided, users are not likely to adopt the solution alternative and will most likely use it only half-heartedly.

Solutions like OnPage Corporation's [clinical communications platform](#) are able to provide CIOs with this level of robust communications and support that they need to ensure improved workflow and support a transition from pagers.

CONCLUSION

A successful pager replacement strategy cannot be crafted in isolation but must be planned as part of a larger enterprise-wide mobility strategy. It must recognize the impact of replacing pagers and the need for education that users will require as they come along for the ride. In some cases, such as deliveries, housekeeping or custodial use, pager use might still be appropriate. However, recognizing the need for flexibility when looking to change to a mobile solution is equally important.

Pagers might have a place in healthcare for the next few years until a critical mass moves over to smartphones and communication and collaboration requirements increase for hospitals.

However smart CIOs will be ahead of the curve and begin a relationship today with a powerful and robust CC&C that provides the necessary tools that improve workflows and communications in healthcare today.

CONTACT ONPAGE TO LEARN MORE ABOUT HOW WE CAN HELP YOU WITH YOUR CRITICAL ALERTING NEEDS

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