CASE STUDY

OnPage
- Replacing the Pager

Boston is known world-wide for the high quality of medical care its hospitals deliver to patients from Boston as well as those coming in for treatment from abroad. The following case study details the specific alerting and paging needs of the doctors in the internal medicine department at one of these hospitals. This hospital has been in existence for over 100 years and has top-ranked specialties across the board, ranging from anesthesia to urology.

Business Situation

This Hospital's doctors experienced several instances when the pages were missed because they didn't arrive on the doctor's pager.

Solution

OnPage's critical alerting technology provided the internal medicine department with the ability to reliably receive and respond to patient requests in a timely manner.

Product

OnPage Critical Alert Management System. Messages sent with OnPage arrive five times faster than with traditional pagers.

Benefits

- Escalation
- Zero missed alerts
- HIPAA compliant
- Ease of use
- Budget friendly

One of Boston's Finest Hospitals Takes in OnPage

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Business Situation

The internal medicine department at the hospital treats adult patients from ages 18-101. During normal business hours, the doctors will see their scheduled patients. After hours and on weekends, one of the practice's 9 doctors is on-call to handle patient requests such as the need for a refill, sore throat, fever, symptoms of depression or any other complaint that is often registered with a general practitioner.

Until two years ago, the nine doctors in the department used a traditional answering service to receive alerts on their pagers. When the patient called the answering service, a message was sent to the pager of the doctor on-call by the answering service. However, there were several instances when the pages were missed because they didn't arrive on the doctor's pager.

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Product

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Benefits

- Zero missed alerts
- HIPAA compliant
- Ease of use
- Content of page is easy to view
- Budget friendly

The problem with pagers

Pagers present many problems to the doctors using them.
- Radio waves used by pagers to send messages are sometimes blocked by the physical infrastructure of various buildings. These buildings can be places like shopping malls or even hospitals themselves.
- Additionally, pagers have a limited range. They are often meant to work in the hospital and can have difficulties penetrating a distance much beyond that. Doctors can easily find themselves out of range of the pager's ability to receive messages.
- Pagers are inefficient. Once a doctor receives a message on a pager, they then need to move the conversation over to a cell phone. This workflow is burdensome for doctors who are often answering pages on the run.
- They are not persistent. If a page is missed, the doctor has no way of knowing that a patient is trying to contact them
- Pagers are not HIPAA compliant. Pagers are not encrypted devices and the information on them is not encrypted. This violates the statutes of HIPAA.

For the doctors at this Boston area hospital, all these points rang true. Their major concern though, as one doctor said before making the switch to OnPage, was:

Are we missing pages? Supposedly people were paged but we never got it.

Putting OnPage to the test

This doctor's team put OnPage to the test. Prior to switching to OnPage, they tested the ability of pagers against those of OnPage. They had messages sent to both systems simultaneously and checked the ability of each device to receive messages in various locales such as shopping malls and hospitals.

The results? Pagers were unable to pick up messages even within the doctors' own office.

Doctors also missed messages when they were at other normal locations like a shopping mall or at home. OnPage, on the other hand, was able to receive messages in all these places.

HIPAA Compliance and the need for change

The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) was signed into law in 1996 and was designed to protect the accessing and sharing of sensitive patient data. The Health Information Technology for Economic and Clinical Health (HITECH), a supplemental act, was signed into law in 2009. HITECH was written in response to new developments inhealth technology and the increased use, storage and transmittal of patient information. The Act was designed to step up enforcement of HIPAA requirements by increasing the penalties on organizations which violated HIPAA rules.
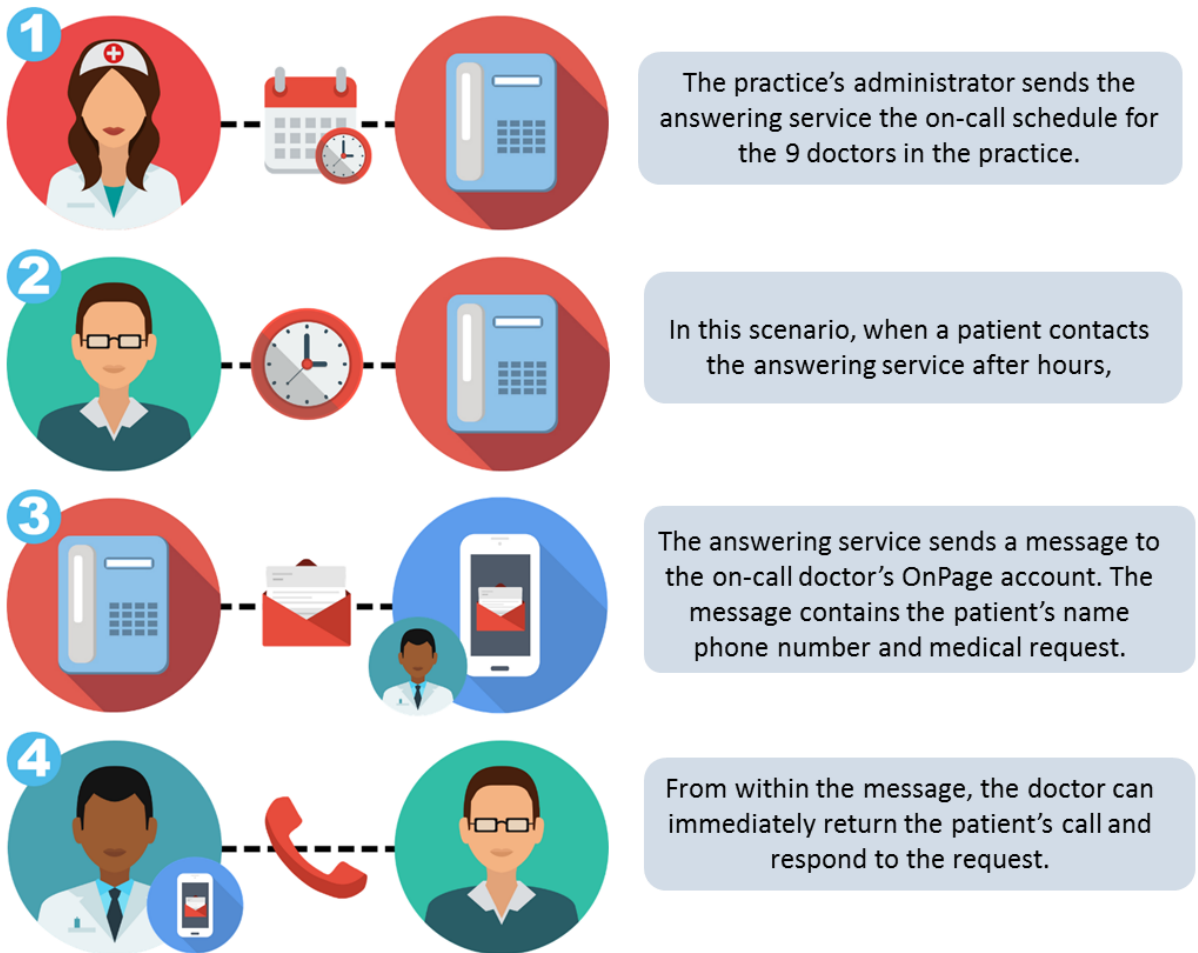
Understanding the language of HITECH took time and it was a few years until doctors understood the full implications and requirements of complying with the law. For the doctors at this Boston-area hospital, understanding their responsibilities and duties under HIPAA eventually led them to find a pager alternative.

While pagers don't compromise HIPAA compliance by simply exchanging phone numbers, exchanging any patient information through pagers is a violation of HIPAA.

With an understanding of how pagers compromise the HIPAA requirements, doctors at the hospital realized the need for a robust technology that would allow them to securely exchange information about the patient such as name, phone number and medical condition.

Answering Services

This Boston-area hospital uses the OnPage service through one of the many answering services that OnPage contracts with. With this particular hospital:

1 The practice's administrator sends the answering service the on-call schedule for the 9 doctors in the practice.

2 In this scenario, when a patient contacts the answering service after hours,

3 The answering service sends a message to the on-call doctor's OnPage account. The message contains the patient's name phone number and medical request.

4 From within the message, the doctor can immediately return the patient's call and respond to the request.

According to one of the doctors in the practice:

We can dial (the patient) directly from our phone by just clicking on the telephone number. Now, we're not missing any pages.

Conclusion

This Boston-area hospital has been able to resolve the very important issue of missed pages. No practice wants to realize that a patient in need didn't get their request answered in an immediate and timely fashion because their request was never received.

OnPage has ensured that this Boston-area hospital will continue to provide world-class medicine and keep their patients well-being at the forefront.