

Communication with a Side of Encouragement, Please: Effective Communication Strategies for a Smooth CDI Program implementation Transition

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Clinical documentation improvement (CDI) programs are spreading rapidly across the United States-and for good reason. They help facilities improve the level of documentation that goes into the patient medical record, leading to fewer errors and an overall improvement for continuity of care. But no matter how necessary or beneficial, changes often present emotional challenges for individuals within the workplace. As Deepak Chopra says, "All great changes are preceded by chaos."

Project managers have the pivotal role of guiding group dynamics in a constructive direction, highlighting the positive attributes of CDI implementation. Clear communication, defined expectations, and recognition of opinions all play a part in successfully encouraging staff to embrace the new program.

Helping staff understand the benefits of CDI, such as improved control over patient care quality and decreased reimbursement denials, will empower them to accept the change with less apprehension. These proactive education efforts will help to circumvent the initial "fear of the unknown" reaction that may occur at the news of forthcoming changes. This article takes a closer look at the importance of a strong groundwork of communication in creating a smooth transition for organizations and staff during the implementation of new CDI programs.

Everyone in the Loop

Once a go-live date has been determined, define a schedule for the specific goals and expectations of the project's deployment. Don't forget to make it clear to all team members that the ultimate goal that everyone is working towards is to provide better patient care. Consider including a detailed list with precise descriptions for each team role. Creating this outline in the beginning stages of CDI implementation is an opportunity to clarify the expected duties for all involved in the process from start to finish, with an intended completion date for the project in mind.

By agreeing on obligations ahead of time, each member acknowledges that they have the time and experience to fulfill their specific tasks. Provide everyone with updated information and deadlines so the team remains aware of what is happening at each stage of the project. Staying in the loop will give them a sense of ownership in the implementation process, helping them feel comfortable with management of the CDI program.

Constant Communication

Listening to team and user concerns is another way to ensure eager participation. Everyone wants to feel valued and respected in their work environment, and it is helpful to understand the apprehensions of the individuals involved in the change. Taking the time to listen demonstrates an appreciation for their opinions and encourages interaction with the implementation process to generate new ideas that could improve the CDI process. The mutual respect that these exchanges develop will foster willing participation in both the roll-out and continued use of the process. Remember that active listening means engaged conversation-no texting, e-mailing, or shuffling papers.

Keep in mind that it is critical to give and receive feedback in a polite and courteous manner during the deployment of the program, as it can be mentally frustrating to only hear about what tasks need to be completed or what corrections need to be made. Repeatedly motivate your team by giving them positive comments on their progress. A good rule of thumb is to give one compliment for every criticism delivered. For example, you might tell your emergency department staff that they are doing a great job when it comes to documenting the location of wounds, but also request that they remember to document the lengths

of lacerations that are repaired as well. Your actions will reassure your teams that they are on the right track, imbuing them with confidence in the CDI program.

You can also use the physical space of the facility to post information on the progress of the project. Flyers can keep the implementation fresh in the minds of the staff and help push for reliable integration results. Changing the flyers often may increase staff communication, making the implementation an accepted everyday process. Maintain contact with everyone involved to keep them aware of how important their CDI program efforts are. In order to accomplish this consistent line of communication, you can establish biweekly updates on issues that have been encountered and the steps being taken to resolve them. Never stop pushing the goal. If you, as a team leader, do not emphasize the magnitude of the project, expect your team members to follow your example.

Documentation Boot Camp

Documentation improvement training will prove invaluable in the CDI implementation process. This training serves as the foundation for understanding all of the concepts that make the program a success. Boost interest in training sessions by offering some modest incentives, such as scheduling a "lunch and learn" meeting where dessert or drinks are provided. You might even bring candy to training sessions to encourage participation or acknowledge when procedures are performed properly.

If you notice that a staff member is struggling during instruction, go grab a cup of coffee or walk around the building and listen to them. Getting them out of the work environment for a few minutes can help calm their nerves-and being away from coworkers may help them feel more comfortable about giving an honest opinion.

Final Steps

When nearing completion for the go-live, give the final push for the project by recognizing all the work that has gone into deployment of the CDI program. Offer a pizza or ice cream party to the first group of nurses or physicians who have 100 percent participation. Reward all other efforts by handing out certificates, sending out thank you letters, or publicizing the triumphs of the team in a newsletter. Rewards will increase the overall effectiveness of long term participation. On the final go-live day, bring donuts or a cake to celebrate the accomplishment of beginning a new and wonderful journey with continuity of care. Even a verbal thank you to your staff and teams will show appreciation for their determination to make the program a priority.

To ensure a smooth implementation process, continue transparent communication and encouragement, keep an open ear, and above all, stay focused on the ultimate goal-better patient care. Define a clear timeline and confirm that your team understands what you expect of them as supporters for deployment.

Chaos may precede great changes, but how a team leader handles that chaos determines the atmosphere of those changes. CDI program implementation may seem daunting, but with active organization and the right attitude, you will enable your colleagues to work eagerly beside you throughout the process.

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