

Finding the Value in Healthcare IT: Implementing the Right Point-of-Care Technology for Your Facility



Healthcare information technology is experiencing a sweeping transformation. Its output has been unparalleled innovation in systems designed to make healthcare safer, more efficient and more comprehensive. Despite the advances in software, the process of implementing and outfitting these systems has advanced little, to the detriment of everyone from caregivers to IT teams. The full potential of these new technologies to increase safety and save time can be hindered when implementation is not well planned. Every new IT project taken on, whether during a new build, a renovation or an IT upgrade, is an opportunity to enhance caregiver performance and avoid the pitfalls of interruptions in workflow and in care. Basing implementation and outfitting choices solely on which manufacturer can provide the lowest cost does not necessarily indicate the long-term value of the equipment from the vendor partner you choose. Organizations should consider a complete analysis of manufacturer capabilities, including workflow integration, product adaptability, lifecycle and the quality of the product's design, in order to make a decision.

When beginning the process of selecting point-of-care technology, the first decision should be to choose a manufacturer partner that shares your organization's vision and commitment to care.

As with any product, researching its manufacturer is a way to begin evaluating the quality of their products, their reliability and your prospective partnership with them. Before vendor selection is made, it is important to investigate how manufacturers will handle selection, implementation, training and long-term support. The manufacturer's products should also balance patient care requirements, budget and maintenance. In particular, it is essential to consider a partner that has a robust maintenance program in place that will not detract from internal resources, such as IT. A manufacturer who is a leader in the industry will understand the need for a dependable partner that shares a common vision, and will ensure that the entire process—from choosing the products to servicing them to adapting them during their life cycle as technology changes to ultimately replacing them when their useful life is complete—is seamless and will not interrupt patient care. Narrowing the selection of manufacturer partners to industry leaders is a proactive step to saving time and money over the life of a product.

Once a small number of potential partners has been chosen, selection of equipment can begin. **While there are a number of effective ways to assemble a selection team representing all divisions involved in the decision, incorporating the caregivers, or users, is essential.** Excluding users from equipment selection may cause them to reject the product. While users may not always make the final product decision, user involvement yields significantly more positive results and feedback, and ultimately helps an organization choose equipment that enhances caregiver performance. When multiple products are being evaluated, designating a demo or lab space to install the products is a safe way in which users can test the equipment without interfering with workflow or patient care. Though users may initially respond to the aesthetics of the products, they should be encouraged to think about other features of the equipment, including the impact on clinical workflow, computing issues, ergonomic factors and adjustability, as well as safety and ability to clean. In this evaluation phase, any manufacturer resources



on training should be available so users understand the features of the product, how to adjust them and can ask questions about how this product will integrate with their workflow.

In addition to users, incorporating the IT department in the decision-making process is also imperative.

Because IT is involved with purchasing computer hardware and mounting equipment, they understand the significance of selecting a particular product and how it will integrate with the organization's hardware. When the IT team is brought into the purchasing and installation group, they are able to coordinate with the other groups that are responsible for installing the mounting equipment to avoid any complications.

When an equipment choice has been established, testing a sample of the product in a live patient-care environment is a final step in confirming a partnership with a manufacturer. Even once product has been purchased and is ready to be installed, there are often many stakeholders and many internal groups involved in the planning and installation of equipment. **Common pitfalls can be avoided by ensuring strong communication among groups.** For example, hardware placement and installation should be considered even before the product has been chosen. From a clinical workflow perspective, leaving technology placement until last may result in interruptions in care. And technology placement is critical because it affects patient outcomes. Computers should be placed to encourage the caregiver to maintain eye contact with the patient during use. Maintaining an open triangle between the caregiver, patient and computer enhances the experience for all parties.

The nuts and bolts of installing point-of-care outfitting present another situation in which upfront communication and a strong

manufacturer partnership can help avoid common missteps. In-house installation performed by technicians unfamiliar with the equipment could lead to disruptions in care and workflow. Considering the lifetime value of a product involves determining the cost and benefits of having a professional assemble and install the products. **To maximize the lifetime value of an investment in point-of-care mounting and outfitting, a professional installer that understands the equipment and respects the patient care environment will make the process faster and more accurate, will ensure that the workflow is not interrupted and will make it easier for a project to adhere to its timeline.**

A long-term investment in point-of-care technology outfitting is not a decision to be taken lightly. What may seem like the lowest cost and fastest process upfront may turn into exponentially higher lifetime costs in terms of lost time, interrupted workflow and inefficient service processes. When planning for IT upgrades, renovations, moves or new builds, incorporating the essential groups of users and IT early in the process can result in a smoother transition. Selecting a manufacturing partner that shares common goals and values and is a proven leader in the market gives reassurance that, should complications arise, they will be managed in a timeframe and manner that will not interrupt care. **Every healthcare organization has opportunities to keep up with the light-speed innovations that are occurring in today's healthcare information technology. Only those that plan properly from inception to everyday use will see the financial savings, work efficiencies and acceptance rates that were anticipated at the onset of the project.**