



Bridging Communication Gaps During COVID-19

Vocera solutions help protect care team, improve patient safety, and simplify clinical workflows to improve operational efficiencies and ease the pandemic's impact on hospitals and health systems.

Effective communication is the backbone of patient care, safety and operational efficiency. As COVID-19 surges, safety concerns for both patients and staff have increased. Efficient and safe patient throughput is more important than ever when managing emergency departments, triage areas, isolation rooms, limited ICU beds, restricted visitor policies, and more. Communication is also essential in maintaining vital human connections at every touchpoint in a patient's journey.

In this recap from the American Hospital Association webinar, "Stories from the Front Lines: Lessons Learned from COVID-19," three healthcare leaders share how frontline workers use hands-free Vocera solutions to improve communication and collaboration, protect patient and staff well-being, and connect isolated patients with their care teams and family members.

LINDA R. POTTS, MSN, RN-BC

Associate Chief Nursing Officer, Clinical Informatics, Tufts Medical Center

During the first patient surge, frontline workers at Tufts Medical Center tried using baby monitors to communicate with patients and care team members in isolation rooms. But this one-way communication system quickly proved to be inefficient.

- If no one was watching or listening to the baby monitor, requests by clinicians in isolation were not seen or heard. Missed requests required clinicians to leave the patient's bedside, go to an ante room, take off their personal protective equipment (PPE), retrieve what was needed, put on new PPE, and re-enter the patient room.
- Tufts bridged this communication gap by increasing its use of the hands-free Vocera Badge that enables care team members to connect directly with the right person or group with simple voice commands like "call respiratory therapist" or "call supply manager." The Badge can be worn and used under PPE, which helps limit the number of times people need to leave and enter the room, saving valuable time and resources.
- Standardizing communication across a hospital is critical, especially during a pandemic when clinicians are often relocated to other areas of the hospital. If all care team members use the same communication technology, like the Vocera Badge, they don't need to worry about remembering names, numbers, or who is on call. Instead, clinicians can let the technology take on that cognitive burden, and they can focus on what matters most.

JOAN ZOLTANKSI, MD, MBA

Chief Experience Officer, University Hospitals Health System

For many years, University Hospitals Health System augmented the patient experience with hourly rounding and shift change hand-offs at the bedside. When COVID-19 restricted the number of care team members in a patient's room for safety reasons, these standard and effective communication practices were disrupted. So, the health system redesigned its rounding and bedside hand-offs using existing technology in a unique way, keeping patients and care teams connected and protected.

- Rather than stopping important patient interactions, care teams conducted rounds and hand-offs virtually. Nurses already using the wearable Vocera Badge to communicate and collaborate, placed the voice-controlled device on patients' beds,



enabling communication between patients and their clinicians who were outside the room. Reimagining how to use the Badge helped keep patients and care teams safer, while preserving PPE by reducing the times staff needed to enter the room.

- The Badge affixed to a bed also enabled family communication, which is critical when visitor restrictions are in place to keep patients, care teams, and the community safe. Nurses and other care team members can use the Vocera Badge to conduct three-way calls that include the patient and their family member in the clinical conversation. Engaging loved ones in patient rounds and hand-offs enables clinicians to have meaningful conversations and make “good catches” that can provide valuable insight to improve patient care and safety.
- Family members who cannot visit are also able to speak directly with their hospitalized loved one by dialing the Vocera Badge located on the patient bed.
- While this new use of hands-free technology was put into place because of COVID-19, the hospital is determined to keep up this successful communication practice post pandemic. Family members who must work, are in another state, or be at home with other loved ones, should not need to be physically in the hospital to get updates or talk with nurses and doctors. Vocera solutions can make these connections inside and outside the facility.

MARGARET DIMOND, PH.D.

President and CEO, McLaren Oakland Hospital

Before the pandemic, McLaren Oakland Hospital implemented the hands-free Vocera Smartbadge in its med-surg unit to improve care team communication and safety. When the coronavirus hit, this unit quickly became the COVID-19 floor, and hospital leaders realized frontline workers across the hospital needed the wearable device to stay protected and connected. To secure funds for the technology expansion, the hospital petitioned the Oakland County Board of Commissioners, which granted CARES Act money to underwrite the project. Passionate about protecting her people and patients, Dr. Dimond also petitioned the medical staff and a local bank to secure additional donations while the hospital was between capital budget processes.

- Hospital leaders made their case for grant funds and donations by using stats that proved McLaren Oakland Hospital was able to improve communication, reduce the use of PPE and increase safety. A staff survey showed that nurses on the COVID-19 floor who were equipped with the Vocera Smartbadge had a greater feeling of safety and well-being than nurses on other units without the device.
- On the COVID-19 floor, care team members seemed to do a better job of comforting patients because communication was worry-free. Nurses caring for isolated patients used their wearable Smartbadge to call family members. On units where tablets were used to facilitate family communication, staff had to sanitize the hand-held devices, which took time and left clinicians wondering if they were clean enough.
- An integration between the hospital's nurse call system and the Smartbadge enables patients to connect directly and communicate safely with their care team members.
- In addition to minimizing risk of infection, saving valuable time, and helping preserve resources, the Smartbadge has a one-touch panic button that staff can use to discreetly and quickly summon help in emergency situations. The device opens a one-way line of communication so security personnel can hear what the team member is saying.

Effective communication is critical to the safety of patients and frontline healthcare workers. It is also important in maintaining meaningful human connections at every point in a patient's journey. Leading hospitals and health systems, like the ones featured here, are empowering care teams with innovative solutions to keep them protected and connected, while providing high-quality care with compassion and respect.

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