Mercy Medical Center – Canton, Ohio:

Using Scripting to Increase Efficiency, Reduce Errors, and Reduce Training Time for Operators

Mercy Medical Center, located in Canton, Ohio, operates a 476-bed hospital serving five counties in Southeastern Ohio. A ministry of the Sisters of Charity Health System, Mercy Medical Center has 620 medical staff members, plus an additional 2,500 employees. Mercy Medical Center is a Catholic hospital that continues the mission and philosophy of the Sisters of Charity of St. Augustine, and it prides itself on being dedicated to excellence, and devoted to healing.

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A Busy Call Center

Mercy Medical Center's call center typically answers almost 90,000 calls each month. They handle a wide variety of requests from callers, including calls for patients and hospital employees, answering service calls for physicians, code calls, alarm calls, prescription refills, remote receptionist, appointments, and scheduling.

A Major Update

In 2004, Mercy Medical Center upgraded their call center system to 1Call's Intelligent Series (IS) platform. Upgrading to the IS platform gave them innovative new scripting capabilities, allowing them to script the various types of calls to their call center. The IS platform also provided significant enhancements to their directories, on-call scheduling, and reporting capabilities for their organization.

After upgrading, the major advantages were "fewer errors, happier physicians, and being better able to accommodate physicians and their busy lives," according to Telecommunications System Coordinator, Carolyn Sonnefeld.

Significant Training Improvements

One of the biggest benefits scripting brings to Mercy Medical Center is the reduced training time for operators. Before scripting, training a new operator involved explaining details about how each type of call needed to be handled, as well as any special requirements for some of the physicians. This process could take up to a month for new operators to become familiar with all the details.

Now, Carolyn builds that type of information directly into the scripts, which has reduced training time for a new operator to about one day.

Carolyn said, "Now we can pretty much pull anyone in, sit them down, and off they go."

Easy Script Building

Carolyn builds all of the scripts for Mercy Medical Center. She uses templates to speed the process of setting up a new physician account. "It took about a month to do some basic work, with a few tricks here and there. I feel confident in saying that probably a couple months into it, I felt there wasn't a whole lot I couldn't handle," stated Carolyn.

Keeping Physicians Happy

When working with new physicians, Carolyn

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collects their basic office information, contact information, and asks how they want their calls handled on weekdays, nights, and weekends. She often gets challenged by new physicians, asking if the call center can provide particular services. "They'll say, 'Can you do that?' And people are really surprised at the technology that we have, and what we **can** do." She continued, "Not once have I ever told someone that I can't do that. Because I actually can."

Simplified Call Handling

In addition to building the scripts, Carolyn said, "I am also an operator more than half the time." She continued, "As soon as we started using scripts, call time was shorter, errors were fewer, training was better. It was just all around more efficient."

The primary reason that scripting reduces errors and speeds call processing is that scripting does all the work in the background. The scripts automatically determine how to contact the physician based on the current day and time. "They don't have to think outside of the box. It makes calls faster, and it improves efficiency. There are less errors this way, and everything is done right there for you. You just follow your screen – top to bottom, left to right," stated Carolyn.

Simplified Dispatching

Prior to using scripting, consults were the most difficult type of call Mercy's call center handled. According to Carolyn, "Every doctor has their own way they want consult calls handled." Now that they are using scripting, "We get all of the necessary information from the caller, such as where the patient is, and what the consult is for. Based on the time of day, and day of the week, and what the doctor prefers to be called for, IS automatically pulls in all of that for the operator. It knows who we're sending it to, where we're sending it (to his home phone, his cell phone, or his pager).

Before IS scripting, that was a little bit of a bear. There were lots of errors there."

When a physician – or multiple physicians – need to be contacted, IS scripting simplifies that process as well. "All the work is done behind the scenes, with the advantage of, for each, we page out several groups as well as individuals. So it's one button that does all the work. And then in the background, we're getting all of these people contacted, all at the same time," said Carolyn.

Seamless Integration

The IS platform is also integrated to Mercy's HL7 patient information database. "We can pull in information based on which hospital it is, and that eliminates spelling errors, date of birth errors – things like that. It speeds up the call time, pulls in all that information very quickly, and then as soon as we select the 'Next' button, the script handles the rest," said Carolyn.

A Team Effort

Making sure that everything is current and updated can be a challenge for any organization. To expedite this, Mercy has a special script for this purpose. "We created a script within our department for operators to help report things, give ideas, things that need to be changed or updated. It's all very neat in one account, and I don't have to go anywhere else for that information. The operators really like that," stated Carolyn.

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Detailed Reporting

Determining what happened on a particular call is very easy with IS. "I use a lot of the IS reports, trying to investigate calls. I would say that's a huge perk now. I can tell pretty much what happens with calls, whether it be an operator error, or something that happened during the call, or if someone hung up – things like that. I feel like Inspector Gadget. It's really great; I love it!" said Carolyn.

Advice to Others

When talking to others about upgrading to 1Call's IS, Carolyn typically asks them what their most challenging type of call is, and then tells them how scripting can help make those calls so much easier. "The biggest thing is that nothing is impossible," Carolyn said. "It looks better, it's cleaner, it's neater, it's just very nice all around."

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