



3 ways digital signage can help prevent avoidable hospital readmissions

by Kara Tarantino

Some hospital readmissions are unavoidable, but many can be prevented from occurring in the first place. Inadequate discharge planning and communication, uncoordinated care, and poor transitioning to outpatient settings are just a few of the contributing factors. As the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid (CMS) is currently penalizing hospitals for excessive readmission rates, hospitals are increasingly looking at the impact of communication (or lack thereof) among providers, patients, caregivers, and others. Clear communication needs to begin when patients are actually admitted to the hospital, long before discharge. Here are three ways effective hospital digital signage communications can offer unparalleled access and opportunity to reach audiences, at the point of care, with information they will need once they return home or to another outpatient setting where they will be introduced to new routines and lifestyles.

Digital signage can:

1. Reinforce to patients and caregivers the importance of following all discharge instructions

Messages encouraging patients and their loved ones to read, understand, and follow discharge instructions are critical to ensuring a smooth transition from an inpatient to outpatient setting. Simple reminders about the importance of filling prescriptions, taking medication as prescribed, dietary compliance, and keeping follow-up doctor's appointments will keep people from coming back to the hospital.

Easy-to-understand and consistent messaging needs to be an integral part of the continuum of care. A person's ability to care for himself is one key component to avoiding hospital readmission, but he must be able to understand his condition (or have a loved one who does) in order to know the right things to do to get the right care.

2. Target messages to caregivers so patients can focus on getting well

When patients are recovering and anxious to leave the hospital, they cannot focus on administrative tasks, so having caregivers along is critical to help avoid confusion and get questions answered. Messages in waiting rooms and on CCTV in patient rooms can reinforce appropriate next steps for patients and demonstrate to caregivers what they can expect once a patient leaves the hospital.

3. Improve communication among staff to ensure proper transition to outpatient settings

Patient education begins long before the first patient-provider encounter, and sustainable and relevant communication is necessary for linking fragmented systems of care. Digital signage monitors in nursing units, employee break rooms, and physician lounges can reinforce process and remind staff about proper patient handoffs. Monitors strategically located in employee areas can deliver the right messages to staff where they need it most, at the point of patient care.

Effective communication within the four walls of a hospital not only affects outcomes and reimbursement, it can be the difference between saving a life and losing one. Digital signage messaging can have a significant impact on changing behavior when relevant messages are delivered to the audiences where they need them most.