Electronic Nursing Documentation and Information Sharing: Driving Homecare Processes

Karen Bavuso, RN, MSN
Donna Bond, RN, MSN

Introduction: Like the majority of clinical environments, nursing documentation and information exchange in the homecare setting is essential for nurses to deliver safe and effective patient care. Especially important in homecare, the interconnectivity and sharing of data is vital to all aspects of the patient's trajectory of care and associated business workflow processes. Partners Healthcare at Home has been using electronic nursing documentation for several years, though most recently, implemented a new EMR system in March 2010, which has the potential to advance information exchange through the use of innovative technology.

Purpose: This poster depicts the processes, both internal and external, that are reliant on electronic data transfer and nursing documentation within the homecare environment. Our integrated electronic medical record (EMR) system not only allows the electronic documentation at the bedside, but also electronic data sharing prior to, within, and after, the course of patient care. Electronic data exchange includes patient referral, insurance verification, scheduling, clinical notes, orders management, billing and payroll, as well as other back end processes.

Benefits: Unlike other clinical domains, nursing documentation drives clinical, regulatory, performance improvement and financial processes. The documentation of an initial and follow-up nursing assessment, using a standard data set, drives the payment associated with that that patient episode of care. Likewise, those same data elements are electronically submitted to regulatory and quality organizations to ensure compliance and evaluate patient outcomes. Moreover, electronic nursing documentation provides a means to communicate to other members of the team, the patient's plan of care, response to treatment, and resultant performance improvement initiatives. Because our nurses are not all in one location, the electronic sharing of clinical data is essential as a communication tool.

Challenges: The remoteness of the homecare setting however, is full of inherent challenges to the success of this sharing of clinical information. Our nurses all have individual laptops with remote databases that require frequent data synchronization. Connectivity and data transfer between all of the remote electronic devices is one of the biggest challenges for our nurses when it comes to electronic documentation. Also challenging are the needed security measures used to ensure information privacy. Likewise, the hardware and software maintenance associated to the laptop and security devises are challenging. Computer literacy is an ongoing obstacle.

Upcoming implementations: We are currently working on several initiatives to further advance the sharing of clinical information. Our current initiatives include a Tele-health interface, digital image interface and scanning into the medical record, e-forms, and electronic physician order signature. We are also in the planning and testing stages of using auto-synchronization to optimize data transfer and minimize the impact on nursing productivity.