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Torrance Memorial Medical Center uses Secure Text Messaging to Optimize Workflow, Coordinate Care

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You're running late so you text a heads-up to the person you're meeting. Your project team texts constantly and keeps the instant messaging system chiming with exchanges. It's only natural that doctors and medical staff want the same convenience and immediacy to coordinate patient care. The issue? Risk to privacy and security of patient personal health information (PHI).

As covered entities, hospitals are under scrutiny to assure compliance with HIPAA and HITECH Rule requirements. Yet the tried-and-true pager is antiquated and non-conducive to optimal workflow in a busy hospital, and the inevitability of mobile device use is apparent to all. Health and Human Services (HHS) has recently rolled out a mobile education initiative to help physicians and healthcare organizations reduce risk and protect patient PHI when using mobile devices.

The potential for more efficient workflow and the need to reduce the pager response bottleneck are what led Torrance Memorial Medical Center to TigerText, a fully encrypted, SaaS platform for secure text messaging. Torrance Memorial is using the application among physicians and case managers in Torrance Memorial Hospitalist Associates (TMHA), which handles close to 50% of all the patients in the hospital and treats up to 140 patients per day. Dr. Alexander Shen, the TMHA Medical Director, elaborates on a primary reason behind the switch to secure text messaging, "The triage of importance when a physician receives up to six pages at a time becomes not just a day-to-day problem, but also an hour-to-hour one. With a pager system, there's no way to tell what is a true emergency and what could wait a couple of hours. We'd decided that if TigerText could work for our hospitalist group, it could work house-wide."

People use mobile devices every day for every facet of their lives. But as Brad Brooks, CEO of TigerText, says, "You have nurses, doctors, caregivers all naturally gravitating towards text messaging via their mobile for daily communication in their workflow. All the content lives on their phones, which creates all types of risks for PHI exposure. So we address HIPAA compliance and recipient authentication, two key concerns for the healthcare industry."

Communication ease is facilitated through integration of the

organization's active directory into the application, so users don't have to know the mobile number of the person they're contacting – it can only go to the intended recipient. Because it's internal (intra-network), the exchange happens at a speed similar to instant messaging. Delivery and "read" confirmations let the sender know what happened and when, providing reassurance and reducing disruption. Brooks says, "Our aim is to help create efficiency in their workflow and improve physicians' ability to respond quickly, with priority channels, while also reducing risk of unintended PHI disclosure. The platform is as simple to use as a regular text message, yet the message stays encrypted during transit and at rest." An organization can also set a limited lifespan for messages, which means they are wiped from a mobile device after a specific period of time. The message remains within the organization's server for records and historical purposes.

According to Shen, TigerText came out ahead of other vendors because their interface has proven friendlier, plus, "We talked to larger vendors, but none of them offered a pilot-style program that would let us get proof of concept down before adopting it house-wide. We've been able to roll it out within our hospitalist group, then to the nurses and now are going house-wide."

TMHA has also been able to streamline, and will eventually eliminate the "tether" effect of multiple communication devices (pagers, landlines, answering services) and reduce to one device. TigerText has worked with them toward complete elimination of the pager device by implementing a pager-type application feature that forwards directly to the texting application on the mobile device. A voicemail transcription feature sends voice messages as a text, with an audio file attachment. There are multiple options and modes for sending a message, whether dialing a number or sending from another secure device.

The non-intrusive nature of the application has proven popular with doctors. As Shen says, "Because we're not playing phone tag, we are more accessible to the patients who are in front of us, yet can be truly responsive to inquiries from other doctors and medical staff while easily prioritizing care needs." Traditional modes of contact are all covered with one secure SaaS. "We gain workforce efficiency and secure messaging, all without our doctors, nurses and other medical staff learning a completely new system or communication method."

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