

White Paper



DOC HALO[®]
The Clinical Communication Company

Physician Alignment

Stop the Revenue Leakage with the Newest Technology

Executive Summary:

The national trend toward employed physicians has strategically altered the landscape for healthcare systems, expanding their geographic reach and enabling impressive scale. As many as 63 percent of physicians are now employed,^[1] up from 20 percent just a few years ago.^[2] The expected result is increased revenue through in-network alliances and a shared vision for improved patient care.

The challenge? Physician referral habits are proving to be harder to rein in than expected, resulting in a steady leakage of patients out of network. Despite network loyalty, research estimates suggest that as many as 25 to 35 percent of patient cases referred from employed providers are going to specialists and facilities affiliated with another health system. This amounts to as much as \$40 million in lost revenue per year.^[3]

Secure communication platforms plug the leaks. By making it easy to find in-network physicians and providing instant access to message them directly, real-time communication systems change referral patterns and restore the revenue streams. The following strategies will help your organization align physicians and manage referrals to close one of the most vulnerable gaps in the health system.

Background: Real-Time Communication

Secure messaging began initially as a way to protect patient health information when physicians began texting at work just as they did in their personal lives. Secure communication platforms encrypt protected data and ensure compliance with the privacy rules outlined in the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act.

However, the patient-care benefits of secure communication quickly emerged: Real-time access to physicians, nurses and staff coordinates care, improves treatment times and reduces medical errors. Without real-time communication, tracking down colleagues and waiting for call-backs become routine parts of a physician's workday. This leads to hospitalists not communicating with primary care physicians about newly admitted patients, or to attending physicians not closing the loop with the next on-call physician. And, when referrals are made by leaving notes in charts or as part of discharge instructions to patients, it also leads to losing patients to other health systems.

A comprehensive communication system allows providers and staff to find the right physician at the right time—and that is where relationships are built and referral patterns are established.

Strategy: Align All Physicians

A common mistake is to assume that physicians are aligned with a health system in proportion to their level of affiliation. In fact, physician alignment efforts should address all three of types of physician relationships:

- **Employed Physicians** who receive direct compensation from the hospital, either salary-based or through some type of productivity-based reimbursement model, such as an RVU system.

- **Clinically Integrated Physicians** who are not employed but may work at a hospital facility, even holding a medical director position or receiving some compensation from the hospital.
- **Affiliated Physicians** who have privileges at the healthcare organization's hospital but do a smaller percentage of their work within the system and usually take no leadership responsibility.

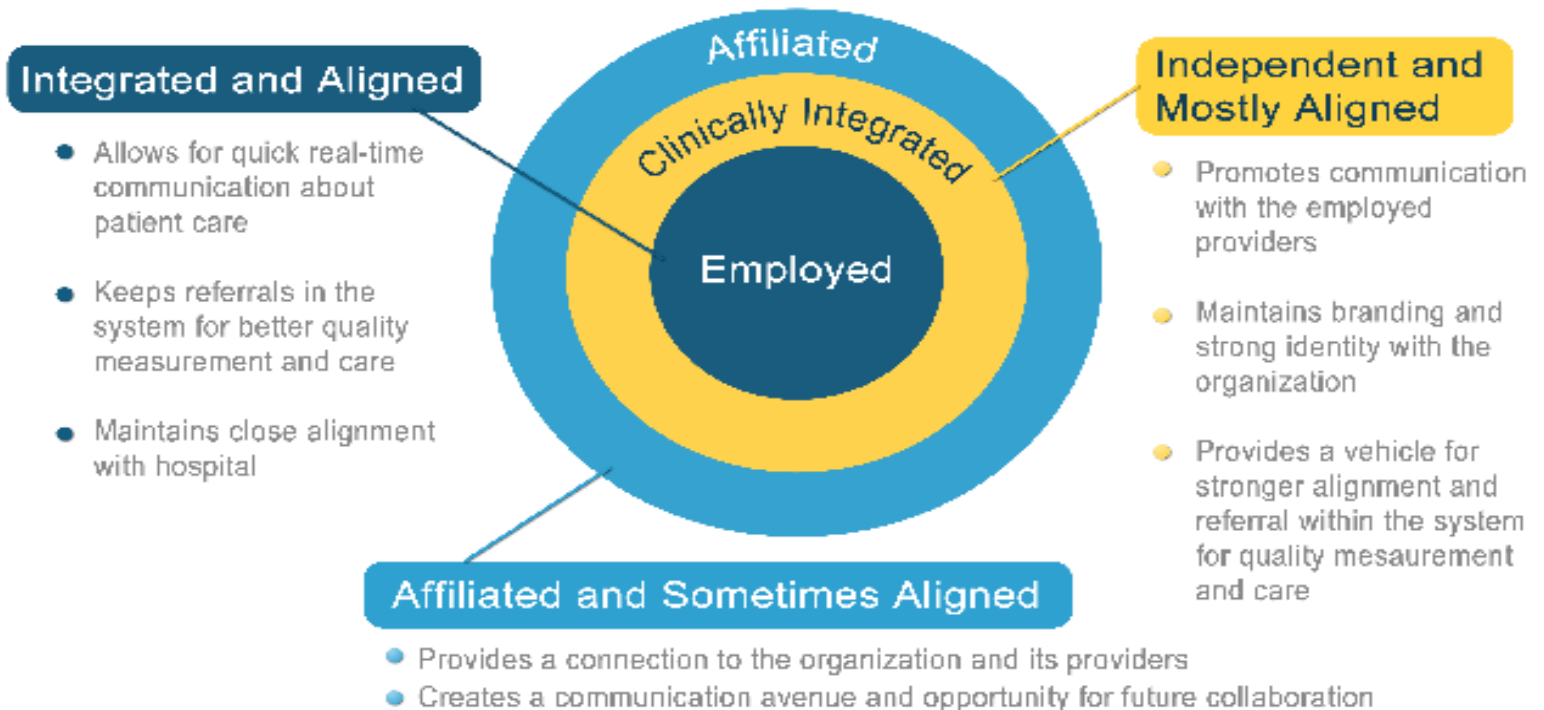
“Membership in a network doesn’t guarantee allegiance to it.”

What’s needed are progressive vehicles that assist with the clinical and economic integration of physicians within healthcare systems. Electronic health records have been important to align physician documentation and to communicate records to referring physicians. Perhaps more important than the passive communication within EHRs, however, is the real-time communication within a secure messaging system.

Membership in a network doesn’t guarantee allegiance to it. Secure texting platforms give members of a health network an actual, tangible tool that serves to connect them. True clinical and economic alignment comes from making it easier for providers to communicate with each other and uniting them in their mission for coordinated, efficient patient care.

Provide all your physicians—employed, integrated and affiliated—with a secure communication platform that unifies the organization, helps all physicians feel connected to the network and allows for easy patient referrals. If they can’t talk to each other—if they don’t feel like a team—they won’t refer to each other.

Physician Alignment in Healthcare Organizations



Strategy: Define the Network

“It’s a very effective way to get ahold of a specialist.”

It goes without saying that time is of the essence during patient care. What bears repeating is this: If you make it difficult for your physicians to find in-network providers, they won’t waste precious time on it.

Dr. Walter Donnelly, a primary care physician in Cincinnati, described an initial frustration upon becoming part of the TriHealth network. He’d have to search the computer during patient encounters to determine if the surgeons or oncologists he was used to referring patients to were part of his new network.

Secure messaging on the Doc Halo clinical communication platform streamlined this inefficient process. The app includes a complete organizational directory, customized according to TriHealth’s specifications. Physicians can be located immediately by specialty, and they can be messaged directly with one click.

“It’s a very effective way to get ahold of a specialist,” Dr. Donnelly noted. “You’re always going to have your phone with you. You’re not always going to have a laptop right there.”^[4]

A good messaging system will integrate with an organization’s Active Directory and allow customization to promote in-network affiliations. Providers can be sorted and searched by specialty, location and other defined parameters. Physicians, nurses and staff will have access to everyone in the organization on a device that they carry in their pockets

Further, a departmental directory will list the main numbers of all departments, clinics, hospitals, affiliated practices and outpatient centers. Physicians won’t need to ask nurses or receptionists to look up numbers; they can find numbers themselves in seconds. The departmental directory saves everyone time and better aligns the entire organization.

And with instant texting capabilities, referral consults can happen within minutes, not hours or days. While physicians without secure texting make notes in patients’ charts and wait for the messaging relay system to locate specialists, anxious patients have an opening to self-refer and exit the network.

Strategy: Analyze the Data

Although more than 1.2 million clinicians and facilities are sending referrals, ReferralMD recently reported that only 35 to 45 percent of total patient referrals ever reach the referred-to clinic or hospital. Every 1 percent increase in retention, they say, is equivalent to \$1 million in additional revenue for a health system.^[5]

Start analyzing the big data your health system has been collecting.

- Determine how often EHR- or chart-based referrals do not lead to follow-up appointments. Examine the primary culprits: Was it the time delay? Did the physicians fail to specify a facility or provider? Was the patient confused about next steps?

“Every 1% increase in retention is the equivalent of \$1 million in additional revenue.”

- Benchmark against industry standards to learn where your organization falls in the referral spectrum. Identify the weakest departments and workflow processes to serve up for monitored pilot programs.
- Understand which referral leaks are driven by patient preference. Address these separately as part of marketing, patient-engagement or patient-navigation efforts.
- Find out which physicians are routinely referring out of network and target them for educational efforts.

Secure messaging platforms provide trackable data that can show in real time where referrals are leaving the system. Administrators of the Doc Halo clinical communication platform can pull reports to identify:

- primary care physicians who are—and are not—texting in-network specialists
- specialists who are not signed in to be reachable on the secure messaging network
- messages going to physicians who are affiliated with other networks
- call schedules for departments where referral leaks are highest

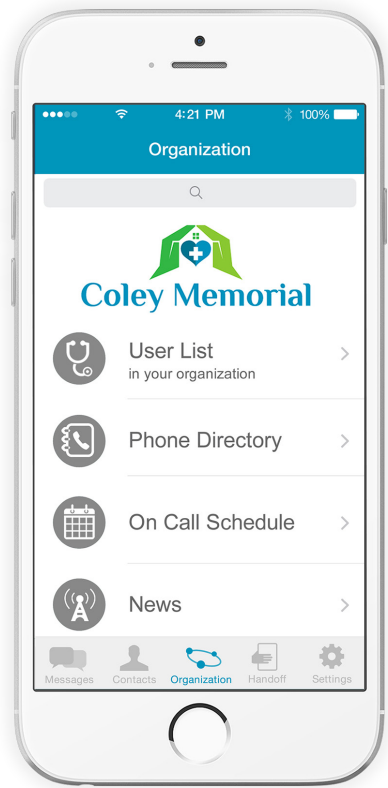
Armed with this data, physician education programs become crucial, noted Nancy Ham, CEO of Medicity, in a recent column for *Becker's Hospital Review*. “The responsibility for referring patients rests on the shoulders of physicians,” she wrote, urging hospitals to establish education programs that outline the collective benefits of keeping patients in network.

“Having quality performance data on hand,” she added, “is key to motivating physicians to change their referral behavior. Physicians in value-based contracts who understand joint accountability for outcomes will want to see that an in-network referral partner delivers high-quality care.”^[6]

Ultimately, for physicians to change their referral behavior, they have to share the health system’s goal of keeping referrals in network. That requires data and education.

Strategy: Create a Culture

Successful companies know the power of branding to influence attitudes and behaviors. A top-notch secure messaging solution will allow healthcare organizations to brand the app with their logo and colors. Their providers and staff look at the app countless times a day. The branded elements help physicians identify with and feel connected to the healthcare organization.



Further, robust secure texting systems can accommodate custom content. Healthcare systems can create home screens with company news, introductions of new colleagues, on-call schedules and other features that align physicians and foster a collaborative corporate culture. One size does not fit all in healthcare—look for a secure texting solution that can be adjusted to suit your organization’s unique needs.

Bottom Line: Effective physician alignment involves far more than simply employing them. Health systems must create a unified, cohesive care network and connect it with a secure, real-time communication platform.

Resources

1. <http://www.medscape.com/features/slideshow/compensation/2015/public/overview#page=9>
2. <http://www.hhnmag.com/articles/5455-hospital-statistics-chart-rise-in-physician-employment>
3. <http://carecoordinated.com/2015/06/18/stop-the-revenue-leakage/>
4. http://cdn2.hubspot.net/hubfs/459556/case-studies/CS_PrimaryCare.pdf
5. https://getreferralmd.com/2014/03/patient_referral_leakage/
6. <http://www.beckershospitalreview.com/hospital-management-administration/referrals-management-5-steps-to-increasing-patient-retention.html>

About Doc Halo

Doc Halo’s clinical communication platform is transforming patient care by streamlining real-time communication and coordinating care among physicians, nurses and staff. The mobile app and online console provide secure, HIPAA-compliant texting for the safe transmission of protected patient information. Robust care coordination tools—including the new Pronto scheduling and messaging system—integrate with all hospital systems to allow instant access to systemwide schedules, Critical and Clinical Teams, EHRs, call center messages, labs and directories. With exclusive focus on clinical communication, Doc Halo has customized solutions for some of the most prestigious healthcare organizations in the country.

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The Clinical Communication Company

855-362-4256
dochalo.com
answers@ dochalo.com

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