

Caring Callbacks

CARINGCALLBACKS™ APP HELPS EMA PROVIDERS ACHIEVE BETTER PATIENT SATISFACTION

EMA is leading the way in providing patients with satisfying clinical experiences through the assistance of CaringCallbacks™, a provider-built web application that encourages physicians in emergency departments (ED) and other outpatient settings to follow up with patients between 12 and 36 hours after their visits.

Patient satisfaction has been a priority for EMA since 2006, when it began using patient satisfaction surveys to monitor provider performance. Over the years, the practice has offered many programs to help its providers improve their scores, including workshops, lectures, one-on-one coaching and periodically distributed written tips on simple measures that make patients feel more at ease and connected with their providers, despite the brevity of most ED interactions.



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In keeping with national trends, in 2013 EMA transitioned from measuring patient satisfaction by an average of a provider's raw survey scores to calculating the percentage of fives – or the highest possible score – that a provider receives on his or her surveys. Jonathan Gorbach, MD, FACEP, an emergency physician at Reston Hospital Center since 2001, had long maintained a high average. But because any score lower than a five does not count toward patient satisfaction when using the percentage of fives as the metric, like many doctors he initially saw his ratings drop a bit under the new scoring method. In looking for ways to go the extra mile for patients and drive up his scores, a colleague encouraged Gorbach to try making follow-up phone calls to his patients.

“The easy stuff I was already doing,” he says. “I was already wearing a pressed long white coat every shift. I shook hands with everyone and introduced myself when I walked in the room. I sat down and nodded and listened to patients.”

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On August 1, 2013, Gorbach began calling to check up on every discharged patient who was eligible to receive a satisfaction survey and found that over the next five months, he received top survey scores 93 percent of the time, compared with 64 percent during the five months prior. He also found that the number of people taking the time to write comments on the surveys more than doubled after he began making follow-up calls. These comments more often specifically noted his services and were sometimes accompanied by a complimentary call to the hospital administrator or in one case a hand-written note dropped at the ED for him by a patient.

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Gorbach’s success with callbacks prompted him to want to make it easier for his colleagues to follow suit. Initially, he would attach patient stickers to blank pages where he could make a few hand-written remarks about the case and note the patient’s contact information to prepare to make a phone call the next day. In 2014 he developed a secure technical solution, writing the CaringCallbacks™ mobile application with a three-step process focused on ease of use and effectiveness.

At the time of the initial patient encounter, a scribe or clinician inputs basic information, including a patient’s name, phone number, account number and brief case notes that will jog the provider’s memory, into an encrypted HIPAA-

compliant database. When the provider next logs in to the CaringCallbacks™ app on a computer, tablet or phone, he or she can easily see which patients are due to receive follow-up calls, access their case notes, make the call and record whether they spoke to the patient or left a message. Finally, using the patient's account number, the data is correlated to the provider's patient satisfaction scores, so that he or she can see whether the calls are having the desired effect and alter techniques as necessary.

"Our goal with this is to make the system so simple, so easy to use, that every surveyable patient receives a callback from their treating provider," Gorbach says.

EMA now requires all of its providers to do a certain number of callbacks for each shift and Gorbach's application has been a welcome tool, says Chief Executive Officer Jackie Pollock. ED staff receive thorough training to maximize the benefits of CaringCallbacks™. For example, scribes are educated on which information to record in the app, and providers are given scripts for leaving effective and safe voicemail messages.

"For patients, it's really a memorable thing when an emergency room doctor calls to check up on them," Pollock says. "This has had a huge impact on our patients' likelihood to recommend our hospitals."

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Gorbach notes that the use of CaringCallbacks has a number of benefits beyond patient satisfaction and competitive advantage. Follow up phone calls can also improve patient safety, giving the provider an opportunity to make sure

that patients with uncertain diagnoses are feeling better and recommend follow up care as needed. Also, the risk for medical practice issues has been shown to decrease when providers make the effort to follow up with a patient and identify whether there were any problems with their care.

Gorbach says one of the keys to the success of CaringCallbacks is that the clinician makes the phone call. The process is more efficient and more satisfying to patients when the person who is most familiar with the case is the one on the other end of the phone. Even in circumstances where a nurse or another member of the hospital staff is following up with the patient for some reason, Gorbach has found that patient satisfaction is most positively impacted when the clinician also makes the effort to call. In this way, he and his EMA colleagues have continued to impress patients like one who commented on a survey that: "I was very pleasantly surprised to find a message on my voicemail that the doctor ... took the time to call to see that I was well and resting at home. I felt so pampered and looked after."

