

# CLOSING THE CLINICAL IT CHASM

Improving communication between IT organizations and clinicians

## EXECUTIVE OVERVIEW

Expensive clinical IT implementations can go awry if there are miscommunications or missteps between the clinicians and IT professionals. IT staff can become frustrated when clinicians fail to use the technology provided, while clinicians may complain about not being involved in the technology selection process. How do you effectively bridge this communication gap and ensure that your expensive investments in healthcare technology succeed? This paper outlines some best practices for helping IT professionals and clinicians connect and work toward the same goals, and explains how a telecommunications solutions provider like Qwest can facilitate a smooth deployment of emerging communications and collaboration solutions that benefit healthcare providers and the IT departments that serve them.

### **Don't forget the clinical mission:**

Collaboration and unified technologies can help clinical staff by delivering the right information at the exact time it's needed, but it has to be easy, and staff needs to understand how it will simplify their jobs and improve patient care.

## QUALITY PATIENT CARE REQUIRES COMMUNICATION

In healthcare environments, the problems that need solving are business and communication problems. In other words, it's not really about wires and code.

In fact, if you simply throw technology at a problem, most likely it won't solve it, and it might make it worse. It's important to first understand the problem you're trying to solve. This requires good communication.

Clinicians and physicians don't always communicate the same way as IT professionals. Misunderstandings can widen the chasm and make it difficult to implement IT projects effectively or provide physicians with the technology they need to improve patient care or make their jobs easier.

Once IT loses credibility with clinicians, it's hard to get it back. Projects usually go wrong for predictable reasons—either not everyone was on board at the outset or people had different goals and expectations. Sometimes there aren't enough people to support the technologies being deployed, or infrastructure isn't robust enough to support the new deployment.

For any healthcare IT project, it's important to take a step back and remember the clinical mission—providing quality patient care. Improving communications between IT staff and medical staff goes a long way toward successfully deploying solutions that will have a positive impact in clinical settings.

## WORKING WITH PHYSICIANS

There are some basic differences between the way physicians and IT professionals operate, and those differences often inhibit the successful deployment of any IT project. Many doctors make fast decisions based on the information at hand or on instinct and they must multi-task. They don't work 8–5, and the patient's needs trump everything else. IT professionals, on the other hand, do work 8-5 and are very focused on individual tasks. Decision making is hierarchical and based on planning and requirements.

For IT staff, specifications are clear and meetings are scheduled and frequent. By contrast, doctors don't get paid to attend meetings and are therefore often reluctant to attend. They have unpredictable schedules that may change in an instant, depending on patient needs.

When rolling out a new IT project or new technology in a clinical setting, keep the following in mind:

- Use clinical data to support the need for the new technology, and make sure the data applies to doctors. Engage them with meetings and updates, and be respectful of their busy schedules.
- Don't get bogged down in technical details with physicians. They want to understand the benefit of the change, not the nuts and bolts of it.
- Look for advocates among the medical staff. A good physician or clinician advocate has experience and a track record of staff leadership, is calm under pressure, and helps to bridge the gap between IT and the medical staff.
- Build rapport. Treat the medical staff as colleagues and help them understand your goals and objectives. Be wary of outliers who make a lot of noise, but may not represent the majority.
- When you've got an important initiative and need key physician participation, try to compensate them for their involvement. Agree to a certain number of hours per month.
- People consume information in different ways, so your communication must be multi-faceted. Effective communication will help you manage expectations, work through inevitable hiccups with IT, win clinical advocates and get things right.

### **CLINICAL IT FROM THE CARRIER'S PERSPECTIVE**

Certainly the infrastructure plays a critical role in clinical IT success stories, and it's important to understand how to avoid common pitfalls during deployment of new technologies in a healthcare setting. Open communication between the IT group and clinical users is key to a successful clinical IT project utilization in practice. Underlying supporting infrastructure is critical for delivering on promised benefits. How do you ensure that your telecommunications provider will ensure success? First and foremost, your telecommunications solutions partner should spend time upfront to learn the overall goals of the organization, the daily routine of end users and goals of the project owners.

The telecommunications solutions provider's sales professionals and system engineers must become extended team members of the IT organization and bring their expertise to bear by putting the right solutions together to deliver the desired results. Qwest, for example, has developed solutions to increase the timeliness of information access in healthcare settings, while keeping data secure. Video solutions and Unified Communications (UC) technologies bring people together over distances for fast, informed decision making, or provide clinicians in remote areas the information they need quickly and cost-effectively. Ethernet and MPLS solutions enable secure connectivity between locations for fast and secure image and record delivery. Understanding the specific objectives of the project ahead of time enables IT staff and the carrier to deliver a solution that is tailored to the application, without miring physicians in technological details that they don't care about.

As an extension of the healthcare IT organization, the carrier can give time back to the IT staff, which has tremendous value in life and death situations. Such UC technologies as intelligent call routing, automated meeting reminders and converting faxes to emails that can be delivered to mobile devices help to make physicians and other clinical staff not only more productive, but more effective in providing quality patient care.

The carrier's job is to provide not just bits and pieces of a solution, but a total solution that fits the specific requirements of clinical environment. Managed services specialists should assemble and implement the right solution and provide on-going day-to-day support, giving cycles back to internal IT staff so they can concentrate on developing applications or assisting users. The carrier can also add value in terms of security; in healthcare, there are strict regulatory requirements. Carriers can provide managed security services at the network level and the expertise to stay on top of changing security needs. For example, Qwest has partnerships with IBM and others who offer world-class security solutions, and they can pass off expertise to the healthcare customer. Carriers like Qwest are also in a great position to leverage technologies and models such as cloud computing to provide scalability and performance while controlling costs.

## SMOOTHING THE EDGES WITH GOOD COMMUNICATION

Implemented correctly, communications technologies can increase the velocity of decision making, but it must be relevant and timely, and delivered in a way that's simple, reliable and secure. Busy clinical staff can become overwhelmed by complex, hard-to-use solutions, which will inhibit adoption. Collaboration and unified technologies can help clinical staff by delivering the right information at the exact time it's needed, but it has to be easy, and staff needs to understand how it will simplify their jobs and improve patient care.

Engaging a telecommunications service provider can make deployment of new IT projects smoother and more efficient, freeing up time for IT staff to educate medical staff, understand their needs and continue to develop solutions that work.

## CONNECT. SIMPLIFY. ENHANCE.®

with Qwest Business Solutions®



Qwest is focused on helping you work smarter, with services that leverage the latest technology and award-winning support. Here are a few solutions that can address the issues covered in this solutions brief:

**Qwest iQ™** On Demand IVR is a powerful alternative to the status quo. Well-designed IVR applications can save you and your callers time and money, but are usually expensive to develop, difficult to design, and even harder to change.

**Managed IP Communications** is a managed CPE-based solution composed of IP Telephony, Voice Mail/Unified Messaging, Wireless LAN, IP Contact Center, and paging.

**Integrated Access** simplifies your voice and data networks onto a single circuit that dynamically allocates bandwidth between voice calls and Internet or VPN traffic.

**Qwest Conferencing** fully integrates audio and Web conferencing into one intuitive interface, using patented technology to ensure that audio and Web are completely synchronized. Manage your conferences with simple point-and-click commands. All you need is a computer, Internet connectivity and a telephone.

**Qwest Managed Applications** lets you select from Qwest Web Mail, Hosted Exchange®, Microsoft SharePoint®, e-commerce capabilities and storage space at affordable prices.

**Ethernet** provides a flexible, reliable way to interconnect locations across a metropolitan (city-wide) footprint. By extending Ethernet beyond the campus-bound LAN out to the MAN, an enterprise's overall networking performance is significantly enhanced.

## WHY QWEST

Qwest delivers reliable, scalable data and voice networking solutions, across one of the U.S. largest fiber footprints.

Qwest serves businesses of all sizes, ranging from small business to 95 percent of Fortune 500 companies, with industry-leading SLAs and world-class customer service.

## LEARN MORE

For more information about Qwest voice and data services for large businesses, visit [www.qwest.com/business](http://www.qwest.com/business) or call (877) 816-8553 to speak to a Qwest representative.