qliqSOFT

Customer Case Study

Walla Walla Community Hospice Optimized Resources In The Wake of COVID-19 By Deploying AI and Other Digital Solutions

Introduction

Walla Walla Community Hospice is a multi-state hospice organization caring forup to 59 patients on any given day. Walla Walla mobilizes nursing and caregiver teams to provide direct care to at-risk hospice patients in their homes. Serving the segment of the population who are at the greatest risk for the virus with staff under their own personal and professional strains opened up a new reality for Walla Walla.

In order to optimize resources and advance digital solutions in the wake of COVID-19, Walla Walla Community Hospice implemented QliqSOFT's Quincy healthcare chatbot solution, unified their approach to medical oversight, and rapidly deployed e-prescribe.

> We knew that we were going to have to take some major leaps forward to augment our medical staff and leverage more contactless technology to improve operational efficiency.
>
> Topher McClellan
> *Executive Director, Walla Walla* Community Hospice

COVID-19 Impact on Home Health and Hospice Organizations

In late 2019, a novel new virus appeared in China with reports of a cluster of pneumonia cases in the large city of Wuhan. Over the ensuing months, this new coronavirus spread across the globe. By February 11, 2020, this virus was given an official name severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) by the International Committee on Taxonomy of Viruses.

SUCCESS INSIGHTS

Saved 30% of Time Per Each Patient

Freed up 50% of Staff

Eliminated 100% of Material Costs

In the United States, the first COVID case was reported on January 21, 2020. By mid-March, the transmission had become widespread and state and federally mandated measures to contain the spread and protect health care capacity were initiated. Nearly all states were under some form of stay-at-home orders with closures of school and nonessential workplaces and cancellation of sporting events and all group gatherings to try to "flatten the curve."

Most lockdowns began between late March and early April. Among the hardest-hit communities were post-acute care facilities, nursing homes, and long-term care facilities. The elderly had a higher mortality rate from the virus compared to all other age groups and massive shortages in personal protective equipment (PPE) left both the patient and caregivers at greater risk for transmitting the virus. Nursing Home and Assisted Living Facilities accounted for 42% of the deaths in the United States at the time of this November 2020 study.

The impact on the post-acute care setting is also seen in the significant increase in caregiver cases and the mass exodus of the workforce. For the first time, many of these workers had to choose between the safety of their families and their livelihood. Although deemed "essential" workers, there were often too few workers to meet staffing needs across the country. While some hospitals, emergency departments, and testing sites rushed to staff-up, other healthcare facilities that were deemed "elective" were required to halt services, resulting in large furloughs of healthcare workers.

The Time To Advance Digital Solutions is Now

At the height of the 2020 pandemic, COVID-19 had impacted 3% of patients treated by Walla Walla either by means of direct infection, mental health impacts of quarantine or infection of a loved one or caregiver.

"We knew that we were going to have to take some major leaps forward to augment our medical staff and leverage more contactless technology to improve operational efficiency," says Walla Walla Executive Director, Topher McClellan.

Three Key Opportunities for Improvement (OFIs)

The pandemic revealed 3 key opportunities for improvement for Walla Walla to leverage technology solutions to address widening gaps in care created by COVID-19:

- Leverage Artificial Intelligence in the New Patient In-Home Intake Process
- Unify locations under the authority of a central, remote, Medical Director
- Improve medication prescribing practices via the implementation of E-Prescribe

OFI 1 – Leverage Artificial Intelligence in the New Patient In-Home Intake Process

The first step towards augmenting the medical staff was outfitting intake nurses with a digital assistant, Quincy, an AI-driven healthcare chatbot developed by QliqSOFT, which would allow them to handle all new patient intake workflow digitally.

The pre-Quincy workflow consisted of an intake nurse visiting with a patient in-home, reviewing dozens of documents with them, exchanging pens for signatures, spending copious amounts of would-be clinical time preparing documentation, and then transporting the papers back to their respective facility location where they would potentially be completed by the original intake nurse or a case manager before being transferred to medical records to be scanned into the electronic medical record. In the wake of COVID-19, this multi-touch process was evaluated and the organization began an evaluation process to find a digital intake solution.

"We needed a solution that would allow our nurses to use their tablets to review intake documentation with patients, capture electronic signatures, and transmit

the PHI securely back to our records department without ever compromising the integrity of the data, the privacy of our patients, or the workloads of our staff." Said Kyla Frasco, Controller for Walla Walla Community Hospice.

The evaluation team didn't have to look far. Walla Walla Community Hospice was already using another product from QliqSOFT - QliqCONNECT the company's HIPAA-compliant secure texting application - for their intra office communications. "We were shocked to learn that QliqSOFT was providing free access to their chatbot platform for their existing customers as a corporate giving initiative in the wake of the pandemic." said Kyla "So I immediately reached out to see if my idea for a digital intake assistant would qualify."

After 2 rounds of design and testing the intake chatbot went live with Walla Walla's Community Hospice intake team in less than 14 business days.

"The documents, including consents, now show up in the EMR the same day they're signed - a huge operational efficiency gain for us," says Topher McClellan Executive Director of Walla Walla. "This allows us to kick-off coordination of care with other facilities sooner as well as various other workflows like benefits checking and counseling."

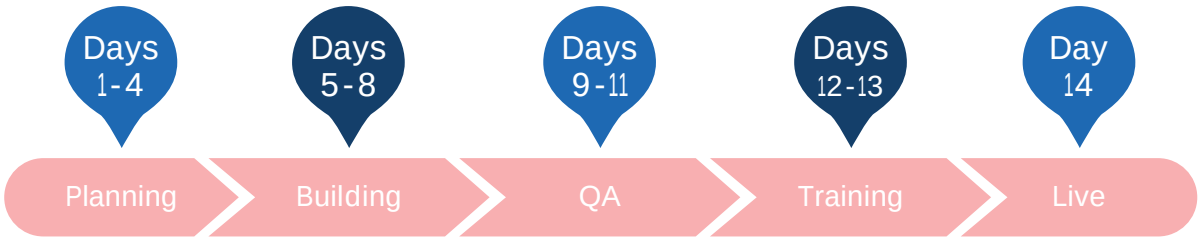
The intake nurse now scans a QR code on their badge with their tablet to access the secure AI-driven chatbot, which then guides the patient through a series of questions and digital forms to complete the intake packet. Upon completion, the entire chatbot conversation and all electronically signed documentation are routed to the Walla Walla medical records department in real-time. A process that previously took up to a week to complete and required passing PHI through multiple hands, is now completed instantly at the point of care.

Each month, QliqSOFT transmits more than 16 Million messages securely across the United States with thousands of chatbots deployed in both acute and post-acute settings.

"We anticipate growing our chatbot program with QliqSOFT over the next year. We already have a design team working on using the technology to meet our requirements for delivering notification of noncoverage to patients. At first, people didn't think chatbots would solve our problems because they could only envision a scenario where the aging hospice patient had to interact with a complex, unnatural, digital dummy - but we've proven that with the right technology partner you can have intelligent chat that's no more complex than a simple SMS " says Kyla Frasco.

OFI 2: Unify Locations Under The Authority of a Central Remote Medical Director

Walla Walla Community Hospice provides compassionate care to patients in the final stages of life and support for their loved ones across three counties (Walla Walla, Columbia, and NE Umatilla country) and two states (Washington & Oregon) covering 48+ lives daily on average.



Medical Directors are responsible for ensuring that every patient is provided with the highest level of care and that the care meets their unique needs. These directors create and maintain the medical component of every patient's plan of care. This can include detailed interventions to manage pain and symptoms, measurable patient outcomes and goals achievable via the plan of care, and even specific medications and treatments necessary to carry out the plan safely for all involved. Medical Directors also complete a recertification process for each patient before program acceptance where they verify the patient is terminally ill with an estimated 6 or fewer months to live.

"Centralizing the authority of our Medical Director created continuity in our policies and protocols, particularly those impacted by COVID-19." said Topher. "Because we had been proactive in this approach prior to the pandemic, our new Medical Director Dr. Dustin Colegrove was easily onboarded during difficult times."

The value of a centralized Medical Director cannot be understated, particularly when serving patients across state lines. "The pandemic created a situation where our patients weren't allowed to move freely outside of their homes, to seek in-person care, or even, at times, to interact with loved ones in their own homes." said Topher McClellan.

But with an increasingly remote workforce comes the increased utilization of technology and the third OFI discovered by Walla Walla.

OFI 3: Improve Medication Prescribing Practices via the Implementation of E-Prescribe

On January 31, 2020, Secretary of Health and Human Services Alex Azar declared a public health emergency in response to COVID-19. Following the announcement, the US Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) worked in consultation with Health and Human Services (HHS) to allow DEA-registered practitioners to begin issuing prescriptions for controlled substances to patients for whom they have not conducted an in-person medical evaluation with specified criteria met. This expansion of service was aimed at supporting prescribing practices that limit exposure, enabling uninterrupted access to practitioners, and safeguarding a consistent and reliable drug supply.

By October 2020 Walla Walla Community Hospice would join the nearly 1 Million prescribers using E-Prescribing, an increase of 25,000 providers since December 2019.

Integration of the prescribing and medical record systems helps prescribers and pharmacists streamline prior authorization, manage drug shortages, support patients over telehealth platforms, and process prior authorizations.

It cost Walla Walla an estimated $1,500/year to begin participating in this aspect of digital care but within one month of being live with e-prescribe, and after electronically prescribing an estimated 7,500 medications, the company projects an annual cost savings of $60-75k when compared tothe manual methods of the past.

"We can now electronically prescribe directly from Wellsky, expediting access to medication, and benefiting from real-time prescription benefits checking for our patients." said Topher McClellan.

MEASURE	RESULT
Time Saved Per Patient	30%
Projected Time Saved With Spanish Language Forms	45-55%
Transportation & Materials Cost Savings	100% Eliminated Costs
% of Staff Able to Transition to Other Tasks	50%
EMR Completion	Decreased by 5 Business Days

Findings / Conclusion

Even with a vaccine on the horizon it's not yet known how long the COVID-19 virus will continue to impact the healthcare industry, with many medical experts speculating that it, like the flu, will have a seasonal rebounding pattern for many years. To adapt to the ever-changing landscape of healthcare, organizations will need to continue to identify opportunities for operational and clinical efficiencies and resource optimization. By leveraging artificial intelligence via Quincy in the new patient intake process, adopting a unified medical management model, and implementing e-prescribe - Walla Walla Community Hospice has been able to expedite care, increase transparency, decrease the potential for staff burnout, and ensure quality compassionate care for all of it's current and future patients.

About QliqSOFT

With over 1500 clients, QliqSOFT addresses the communication needs of healthcare organizations via it's secure, scalable, modular, Virtual Care Platform. The HIPAA-compliant platform, comprised of QliqCONNECT Secure Messaging, AI-driven Quincy Healthcare Chatbots, on-demand Virtual Visits, and real-time GPS-enabled resource management solution Visit Path, delivers an average of 1.2 million clinical messages exchanged across the U.S. daily and more than 6 months of live virtual care performed every 180 minutes. To learn more, visit www.qliqsoft.com.