

Curing the Chronic Confusion Syndrome

By Sid Mandel

**The Bad News: your hospital is losing money over disoriented patients and doctors.
The Good News: there's a treatment that works.**

I am not a doctor (though my mom would have loved me to be one), but my course of work often takes me to hospitals and clinics. Being used to walking the premises of large medical centers, I probably look like I know where I'm going; that must be why, on an average walk of 300 yards, I'd be asked for directions by bewildered visitors at least 5 or 6 times.

This phenomenon is just one symptom of a disease many medical centers seem to suffer from, which I'd like to call "Chronic Confusion Syndrome", or CCS. While disoriented patients might seem a fairly tolerable symptom considering the size and complexity of some hospital buildings, CCS can also infect hospital staff, especially customer-facing employees like doctors, who treat waiting patients across multiple treatment rooms. In the case of doctors, knowing when to go to which room seems to be highly classified information... either that, or this info too often gets lost somewhere between triage and treatment.

Luckily, though, while not being a doctor I do know of some possible cures for Chronic Confusion Syndrome.

Why Chronic Confusion Syndrome Is Dangerous

Disoriented patients tend to develop symptoms of their own, including severe anxiety and aggressive behavior while waiting for a doctor. Disoriented patients also tend to remember their unpleasant experiences and some of them will arrive for future appointment even 1 hour early (to make up for getting lost in the corridors), thereby critically congesting the already packed waiting rooms. Having waited much longer than necessary, they will also take up more of the doctor's time than necessary (because, having waited for 1 hour, you'd expect at least 15 minutes of the doctors' attention, even if 5 minutes are all that's needed).

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And neither are doctors. So this is serious stuff”*

As patient flow is so strongly entangled with doctors' workflow, any impediment on one side would immediately hold back the other. I regularly see doctors become overly dependent on the triage team to provide them with an itinerary for the upcoming scheduled patients and their location. However, much like the weather forecast can tell you a lot about the rain you're already soaked in, and very little about tomorrow's storm, so does this itinerary lose its accuracy when looking at more than 2-3 patients ahead. When triage employees are all busy, doctors usually do not have alternate resources for the very basic information: where to go next. Needless to say, waiting room floor space ain't cheap these days. And neither are doctors. So this is serious stuff.

The Cure: Technology Does The Trick!

Treating CCS requires a strong cocktail of medicines, prescribing solutions for both Patients and Staff symptoms. The active ingredients for the patients: you would want to reduce the visitors' level of uncertainty as soon as they enter the building and keeping them informed along the path to their destination; In other words, we are talking about: reception; directions; and queuing.

The active ingredients for the staff members: all the information they need in a visible place, updated every second with specific instructions regarding the next treatment and location.

Let's review each of the active ingredients that organize the patient flow, while providing excellent Room Management capabilities:

- **Customer reception management** technology delivers immediate benefits. Whether you use self-service to check in visitors, or the reception team, technology can easily provide the visitor with orientation tools such as: onscreen map of the building indicating 'you are here' and 'doctor is here'; printed walking directions; and, an assurance for the patient that he's already "in the system", that is - having signed in at the entrance already checks him into the doctor's queue. So, no need to run!
- **Digital signage** systems can take care of keeping the visitors on the right track until they reach their destination. Screens can also interact with the patients when they are waiting for a doctor in the waiting area, or even as they wait in the treatment room. Digital Signage can call patients to service, inform patients and educate them about the process, and any other relevant service or advertisement.

- **Queuing systems** should take care of patients from the moment of arrival, managing the impossible mix of random walk-ins, appointments, urgent cases, and the patients "who just came for a prescription". Such queuing systems should also be able to provide solutions for over-crowded waiting areas: allowing a patient to wait at a nearby cafeteria and to receive a text-message notification to his cell phone before he is about to get called for service.
- **Room Management** software maximizes administrators' ability to utilize their valuable resources - staff and rooms. This tool guarantees that doctors who use multiple treatment rooms simultaneously, can do so using automated tools: all the information will be visible to all staff members on digital screens that present real-time information and directions. Room management software can generate alerts to different levels of the staff. For example, upon finishing a treatment, a text message can be sent to the staff member that is in-charge of preparing the room for the next patient.

The Perfect Cure: Total Patient Experience Management

New York based software firm, Q-nomy Inc., offers an integrated solution that combines healthcare-oriented sign-in, digital signage, queue management and room management capabilities. Q-nomy's seamless integration of every component in the package produces a consistent feel to every point of interaction between the visitors and the system, be it the point of reception, directional displays or queuing system. This consistent feel elevates the quality of the patient experience, and creates a relaxed atmosphere where visitors and staff alike feel certainty and reassurance.

With an install base of hundreds of medical sites ranging from small clinics to large hospitals, Q-nomy's solution is one proven cure for Chronic Confusion Syndrome that has been shown to increase patient satisfaction, reduce congestion at reception and waiting areas, and create a better working environment for the medical staff.

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This article was originally published by EHM Executive Healthcare magazine, issue 10, Q2 2010.