improving patient throughput: key ingredient to enhancing operational performance
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BY PATRICIA A. HINES, R.N., PH.D.

Whether a hospital is forced to divert patients due to a lack of emergency department capacity or just looking to increase the bottom line, patient throughput can play a significant role in overcoming these and other operational performance challenges.

Truly successful organizations must engage the entire healthcare team to address capacity, improve continuity of care, and determine proper bed aggregation by service lines to effectively deliver appropriate care to the right patient at the right time in the right venue. The process is both intradepartmental and interdepartmental. It is as crucial to assess and improve within a single department as it is to examine and streamline the processes, work flow, and communication patterns that cross several departments and influence the ability to move patients across the continuum of care.

A comprehensive and manageable approach to examining patient throughput includes evaluating the five key processes of access, placement, care delivery, support, and discharge.

ACCESS – Several strategies exist to improve patient flow within the emergency department. Minimally, medical and nursing leadership must be able to access just-in-time data for cycle time of discharged and admitted patients. Key data points include time to triage, time to registration, time to first physician to see the patient, time to discharge decision, and discharge disposition. The triage and registration processes should be analyzed for efficient process flow, including the role of the physician/extender in triage. Fast track utilization and staffing patterns should also be reviewed for work flow efficiency. The utilization of a results waiting area will free up bed capacity for those patients waiting for results before discharge to home.

PLACEMENT – Central to appropriate inpatient bed placement and utilization is the role of case management. The role of an ED case manager will ensure appropriate inpatient bed placement, while an effective case management program will facilitate appropriate bed utilization throughout the continuum of care. Daily review of observation patients, as well as one-day length-of-stays, should be monitored and reviewed with the medical staff leadership. The initiation of an admit nurse or admit unit can decrease the time from decision to admit a patient to the time the patient is received by the unit.

CARE DELIVERY – Daily ICU rounds and medical-surgical discharge planning rounds, as well as weekly outlier rounds, are effective tools to engage the entire healthcare team in patient care management. Similarly, proactively addressing palliative care issues can support a patient’s end-of-life wishes. Hospitalists, intensivists, and nocturnists should be utilized to increase compliance with order sets and protocols, and facilitate timely medical decision-making throughout the care process.

SUPPORT – Of equal significance is the availability of professional support services seven days a week, as well as a process to identify patients pending discharge for priority diagnostic exams and reports. The role of the clinical pharmacist has expanded to assisting physicians with pharmacotherapy decision-making, as well as monitoring patients for drug efficacy and safety. The availability of therapies, such as physical and speech therapies, seven days a week facilitates efficient progression of care. As with all clinical and support departments, staffing and scheduling of staff are vital to ensure that patient care demands are being met.

DISCHARGE – Leadership must be able to access just-in-time data for cycle time of discharged patients. Key data points include documented time from when the discharge order is written to actual patient discharge and cycle time for bed turnaround. Patients and families must receive discharge education prior to the day of discharge and have their discharges scheduled to facilitate timely discharge. Finally, consider the availability of aftercare venues in the community and their relationship to the hospital.

A hospital with a length-of-stay reduction of 0.3 days equals a potential savings of $1 million based on labor costs alone. Careful planning, communication, and implementation of these patient throughput strategies will help ensure the hospital’s continued success.

For more information on ways to improve patient throughput, please contact Dr. Hines at 310.320.3990 or phines@thecamdengroup.com.
facing declining volume? investigate these factors to uncover turnaround strategies

BY MICHAEL J. RANDALL, M.H.A. AND BRIAN J. SILVERSTEIN, M.D.

For information on strategies to overcome declining volumes, please contact Mr. Randall and Dr. Silverstein at 312.775.1700 or mrandall@thecamdengroup.com and bsilverstein@thecamdengroup.com.
2008 victor e. schimmel memorial nursing scholarships

Each year The Camden Group awards three $3,500 scholarships to nurses working towards advanced degrees. The goal of these scholarships is to assist in addressing the nursing shortage in California by supporting the advancement of future leaders and nursing faculty.

This year the scholarships have been awarded to three outstanding students:

» Ms. Suzanne August-Schwartz is enrolled at Rush University and is working on the completion of her doctorate in nursing. Her goals after graduation include advancing the Family Nurse Practitioner Program at Samuel Merritt by increasing the number of students enrolled in the program and the number of clinical sites in the San Francisco Bay area providing services to underserved populations.

» Ms. Pamela Miller is enrolled at the University of California, Los Angeles and is working on her doctorate of philosophy. Her goal post-graduation is to educate the next generation of nurses and apply for a post-doctoral fellowship, while maintaining clinical practice as an acute care nurse practitioner and clinical nurse specialist.

» Ms. Virginia Hart-Kepler is working on the completion of her doctorate in nursing at the Hahn School of Nursing at the University of San Diego. Her goals post-graduation include becoming a full-time faculty member with the School of Nursing, teaching tomorrow’s nurses, and continuing to practice in a community setting as a family nurse practitioner.

Congratulations to these outstanding nurses and future nursing faculty.

the camden group continues to grow

We are pleased to announce the following additions to our team:

Patricia A. Hines, R.N., Ph.D.,
Vice President, Hospital Operations
Dr. Hines’ experience in strategic, operational, and clinical assessments for a variety of organizations adds strength and innovative expertise to our performance improvement services.

Blair A. Contraotto, M.P.H.,
Vice President, Business Advisory Services
As a former hospital CEO, Ms. Contraotto adds to our ability to assist clients achieve their desired strategic, financial, and operational performance objectives.

Michael J. Randall, M.H.A.,
Manager, Business Advisory Services
Mr. Randall has experience in both business advisory and hospital operations services, including ambulatory planning and length-of-stay management. He is based in our Chicago office.

Diane V. Zeoli, M.B.A.,
Manager, Financial Advisory Services
Ms. Zeoli specializes in financial planning and finance operations in academic medical centers and teaching hospitals, and her experience expands our financial advisory services.

Marc G. Mertz, FACMPE,
Senior Manager, Physician Operations
Mr. Mertz’s expertise in physician practice operational improvement, medical group development and management, and physician-hospital relationships adds greater depth to our physician operations services.

Please contact our new team members for expert advice on your strategic, operational, and financial needs.

Los Angeles – 310.320.3990
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strategies for underutilized capacity

BY BARBRA Z. RIEGEL, M.B.A.

It is not uncommon to walk the halls of a hospital and find patient rooms being used for storage or offices and even entire wings closed. This is expensive space— is it being used for its highest and best use? As organizations struggle to become or stay financially viable, maximizing existing assets is crucial to success. Here are some strategies to consider:

1. Evaluate high margin services for growth.

What services are most profitable for the organization on a per case basis? The highest margin services for a facility are often double to triple that of the average. Given the amount of work it takes to acquire an additional new patient, efforts should be targeted at services with the largest return.

2. Identify new program opportunities.

Identify new program opportunities by examining market demand and talking to physicians and key stakeholders. These may take the form of a new service line, such as neuroscience, a niche program, or even a population specific program. Some hospitals have dedicated floors or wings to a specific population (e.g., Japanese or Korean). On these floors, they cater to patients and physicians of that ethnicity with nurses who speak the language, customized ethnic food offerings, and literature and education materials translated into their language. This can differentiate a facility in the marketplace and grow market share to utilize existing capacity.

3. Lease space to third parties:

a. Contract with a company to manage a new service. This works well for niche services such as acute rehab, geropsychiatry, subacute care, etc. There are companies that will offer turn-key services to manage the unit for a facility that does not have the resources or competencies to do so.

b. Run the service for another organization. For example, a hospital had excess skilled nursing (SNF) beds. It entered into an agreement with a medical group that needed access to SNF beds. Under this arrangement, the medical group leases beds from the hospital. The hospital is paid a fee for providing the facility and management services.

c. Rent the space to another hospital operator that licenses a hospital within a hospital. This can work for specialty services such as pediatrics, long-term acute care (LTAC), or other services where another hospital can run a hospital within the facility. It generates lease revenue for the space, as well as purchased services through the use of ancillary and other support services provided by the host hospital.

Vacant inpatient space is a valuable asset, and choosing the best use of the space is an important decision. When considering how to use underutilized capacity, identify early in the process the criteria most important for the hospital (e.g., financial consideration; consistency with overall strategic direction) and then evaluate the options against the criteria to make the right choice for the organization.

For more information on strategies for underutilized capacity, please contact Ms. Riegel at 310.320.3990 or briegel@thecamdengroup.com.

top 10 reasons to have a residency program and how to assure success

Hospitals pursue teaching programs for a variety of reasons. If structured and monitored properly, residency programs can provide hospitals with a competitive advantage in several areas. If not managed properly, however, these programs can increase exposure to significant financial and compliance risk. For our Top 10 list of reasons to consider a residency program and the factors critical to success, please visit www.thecamdengroup.com/top10/residencyprograms.asp.
Since 1970, The Camden Group has been providing management and consulting services to the healthcare industry exclusively. We have supported more than 1,000 medical groups, hospitals, and health systems located in 45 states throughout the nation.

Our wide range of capabilities and commitment to our clients’ vision and goals have made us a respected industry leader. With a multidisciplinary approach focused on our clients’ business needs, we are able to provide the support required to identify and develop effective and practical solutions. We are differentiated by our national industry perspective, innovative approaches, proven methodologies, analytic rigor, and objectivity. For this we have earned our clients’ trust, resulting in long-standing client relationships.

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