MeritLinkx Healthcare Consulting

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The Value of Clinical Content Strategy in a Public Health Crisis

One of the most pressing challenges in healthcare today is unstructured and inconsistent data that causes clinical applications and platforms to be difficult to use and leverage. This is especially true during a public health crisis, such as the current COVID-19 pandemic. Healthcare organizations are, at times, forced to seek out expert advice and additional solutions as they try to manage and utilize the information they've collected from multiple disparate systems. If clinical content is not available in the EHR, healthcare professionals are often at a loss to find the missing information. I have been engaged as an advisor for many clients to help guide them in creating a central repository to archive and manage the life cycle of their clinical content. From there, a true content management strategy can be deployed to support organizational data governance. These engagements can least many months to a few years as the process to disentangle content and convert it into usable data and intelligence is indeed a laborious one. However, I still believe that it shouldn't matter where care is consumed – the clinical content should be made available. In a perfect world, clinical information from the pharmacy, to the clinic, to the ICU should be accessible in order to support high quality and safe continuity of care.

There are many approaches one can take to begin the journey to develop a clinical content strategy, I offer three starting points below that can help anyone start the process, even in the midst of a public health crisis.

Communicate the Value to Technology Stakeholders and End Users

InformationTechnology departments can be the most difficult stakeholder group to buy in to this concept. Its not because the value isn't there for them, rather the benefits are not realized until further into the life cycle. The first benefit that should be communicated is the sophistication that will be added into the build process. When there is a strategy to define, govern, and maintain all clinical content - there is ultimately a reduced burden for builders to gather requirements. An effective clinical content strategy will dramatically improve design sessions as there is a concerted effort to streamline documentation options and data sources such that importing and exporting information organically becomes an easier and more expedient task. Second, is there is end user benefit and value when clinical content is strategically managed. The ultimate outcome should result in organized repositories for key items such as care plans, assessments, and order sets. Not only does this level of organization improve the end user experience, it also allows for better downtime security by reducing the number of document versions and tracking of individual preferences.

Engage the Regulatory Compliance Gurus

Clinical content strategy is music to a regulatory persons ears, so why not recruit them to advocate for its value along with you? An effective strategy for clinical content comes with built in audit trails, tracking of edits and additions, and version control management. These are exceptionally helpful benefits for those who

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track and trend organizational readiness, compliance, and performance. Furthermore, there is the opportunity to formalize clinical content management by way of integrating it into the policy and procedure processes. Ideally, any flow sheet, form, order sets, care plan, assessment, etc. should have a corresponding policy and procedure that could be tied together for updates and publishing. Additionally, a thorn in any regulatory professionals' side is business continuity during a down time or crisis – much like the current state of affairs today with COVID-19. However, when clinical content is managed through a well-defined strategy, ensuring wide spread and standardized care becomes a lot easier. This is because the care team will use the same set of tools that have already been vetted and validated.

Design an Exit Route

The down side risk to any strategic program is the potential bottle necks that may arise within the approval process. In my experience, this is the underpinning to gaining buy in and adoption when organizations try to stand up a clinical content management program. Executing a clinical content strategy shouldn't bog down your workflows, especially during a crisis. Therefore, there is a need to design a way out of the full process when there is an urgency to do so. For example, if order set content usually requires sign off by layers of stakeholder approvals, which can take 30 days to run the course, perhaps there is a way for expedited approvals when extenuating situations arise. I saw this need come up during the Ebola crisis where eliminating steps of the normal sign off process was needed to make progress. The exit route was supported by increased information sharing during daily huddles with front line and executives. In the end, we did not allow the process to get in the way of progress, and realized an exit route was essential to support and sustain patient care.

Illustrative Steps for Order-Set Approval
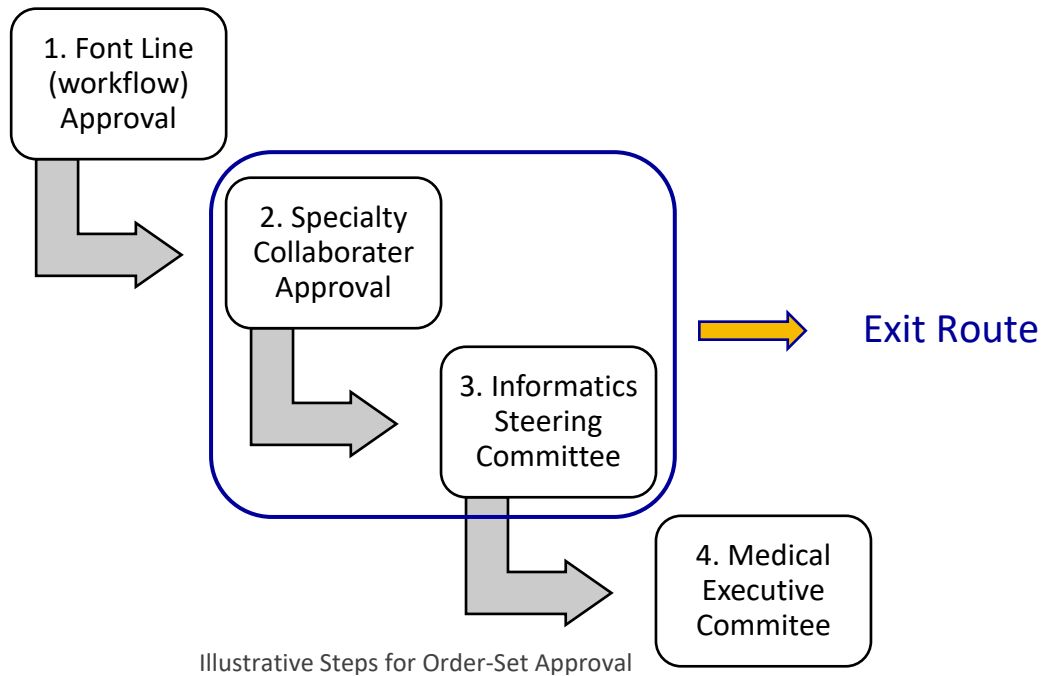
Clinical content isn't easy to manage. With structured and unstructured information stored in disconnected data repositories across multiple departments, clinical content often creates "islands of information". The sheer volume and variety of clinical information, coupled with the increasing demand for access, the task of aggregating all of the relevant data seems like an impossible challenge. Yet, it's on healthcare information technology (HIT) professionals to make it happen, and there is a lot of work ahead of us to get the job done. The good news is this: adopting a clinical content strategy that feeds into an enterprise wide data governance program can truly transform this challenge into golden opportunity.

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About MeritLinkx Healthcare Consulting

MeritLinkx fills a gap in the consulting industry by bringing real life experience into our work as trusted advisors. We believe that aligning clinical operations with the bottom dollar is key in making the volume to value transition. We love showcasing our change management abilities while helping clients transform their business model. Our approach is patient centric; we place patient experience, outcomes, and safety as our top priority. Doing so allows our clients to do the right thing while also realizing financial gains and sustainability in the value based payment industry.

MeritLinkx is headquartered in Dallas-Fort Worth and offers nation wide services in a wide variety of settings and topics. Our pragmatic approach, accessibility, and sensibility is tangible when compared to big box firms. If you're looking for high value and affordable consulting services, contact us at info@meritlinkx.com

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Rabin is a seasoned healthcare leader who brings 20 years of experience in software implementation, clinical application & data analytics platform development, data governance, AI technologies, post implementation diagnostics, electronic workflow mapping, content management, performance improvement, and provider engagement strategies. Rabin has a passion for helping organizations leverage their IT and analytics portfolio to improve care, outcomes, and efficiency. He enjoys connecting the dots between technology and care delivery optimization. Rabin considers himself a "hybrid" professional who works to close the gaps between care delivery and the effective use of technology and data.

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