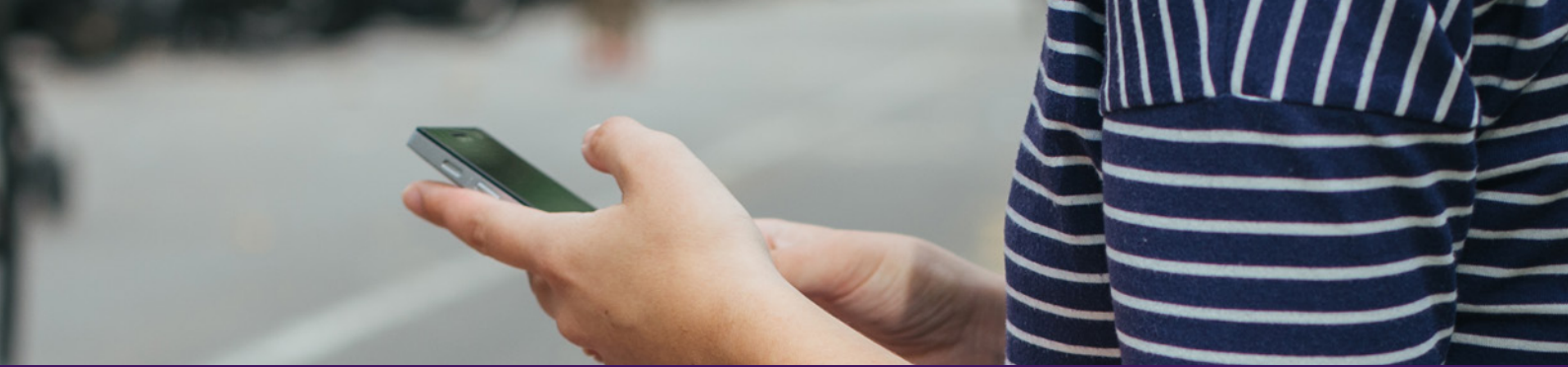




SMS in Hospitals

Communicate with all your stakeholders to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the care you provide





Australian hospitals are an essential resource within our healthcare system. Effective communication within hospitals is critical to the successful fulfillment of their important role of caring for the ill. Inadequate communication can present a real problem, due to the vast size and multiple stakeholders within hospitals.

Between 2011-2012, there were 1,338 hospitals in Australia, all varying in size and capacity. There were 56,582 beds in public acute hospitals; 1,838 beds in public psychiatric hospitals; 2,957 beds in private free-standing day hospitals and 25,394 beds in other private hospitals¹.

Stakeholders in hospitals include staff members, patients, family members, doctors, nurses, surgeons, financial staff, administrative staff and many others. All of these stakeholders need to maintain effective communication with each other for the organisation to be effective as a whole.

A communication barrier that needs to be overcome is that they are divided into various departments which require cooperation for effective treatment to be provided. Certain patients may need to progress through multiple departments during the process of their treatment, meaning all departments must remain in close contact.

As there is such a huge variety of stakeholders, any medium for communication must be suitable to all these audiences.

An effective communication strategy for Australian hospitals must include a medium which is ubiquitous in accessibility to all possible stakeholders. A medium which is capable of instantly connecting thousands of people, across many departments in a short amount of time.

Evaluation of eligible mediums:

Email

Email is a popular and accessible means of communicating across broad groups of people. As a communication medium, it can be useful within hospitals for connecting stakeholders. Email delivery is immediate, yet messages are not always read upon receipt.

Many patients in hospitals could be minors, or not in a position to make decisions relating to their treatment. For this reason, the communication between hospitals and families of patients needs to be swift.

¹ The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2013, "Australian Hospital Statistics - 2011-2012"



Email is not a suitable avenue to facilitate fast responses even if messages are read quickly. On average it takes 90 seconds to respond to an SMS, compared with 90 minutes to respond to an email².

The recipient may also have an overflowing email inbox, full of spam. This will need sorting through before they even come across your email.

When it comes to sending important information, relating to patients who may be in critical conditions, communication methods must be extremely reliable and effective. Email is a medium which can allow the recipient to ignore important information without even realising. SMS is the more trusted avenue of communication for the general public, with a 98% open rate compared to a 22% open rate for emails³.

Phone calls

Phone calls are a traditional medium for communicating within hospitals. They are perhaps the most reliable way to ensure the delivery and understanding of a message.

Having staff make phone calls to patients and staff is both time consuming and expensive. Automating SMS will relieve both the time and cost. You can contact thousands of people in a matter

of seconds and it can cost as little as six cents a message. Not to mention, phone calls also occupy the valuable time of the receiver. It takes an average of five seconds to open and read an SMS⁴; taking up no time at all for the recipient. They can also read the message at a time convenient for them.

Phone calls are often ignored, especially if they are not perceived to be urgent. If the receiver is in meetings, for example, they will most likely ignore a phone call. They are, however, able to discreetly read a text message.

SMS

Over time, SMS has remained the most ubiquitous medium for mobile messaging. In fact, in 2010, with 4.16 billion users, SMS was the single most popular data channel in the world⁵.

For SMS to work, there is no need for recipients to have an active internet connection. Recipients don't even need to be immediately available for conversation to receive the information. The message will be there for them as soon as they have a moment to look. Which is every five seconds on average⁶. There is also the option for audiences to respond immediately, speeding up treatment processes. Using SMS will allow hospital workers more time to care for patients and organise their business.

2 SnapHop, 2012, "Mobile Marketing Statistics"

3 Frost & Sullivan, 2010,

4 Oregon University Blogs, 2014, Emma Hsu, "Mobile Marketing"

5 The Atlantic, 2011, "Why Texting Is the Most Important Information service in the world"

6 Oregon University Blogs, 2014, Emma Hsu, "Mobile Marketing"



Uses of SMS in hospitals

Reminders

People always have their mobiles with them, and as such are easily reached via SMS. Hospitals can use this in order to remind patients, families and other stakeholders of the patient's state of health. How to continue their treatment, their general health care and whether they remain in hospital or are discharged.

Outpatients can be reminded of medication they need to take, or exercises necessary for recovery. Reminders can also be scheduled to ensure that patients don't miss any follow up appointments.

A recent study, published in the Medical Journal of Australia, examined the effects of text message reminders for hospital outpatient appointment attendance and found excellent results. The failure to attend rate (FTA) was significantly lower among the trial group who received text messages, with rates of 12-15%, compared to 19-39% among the group that did not receive reminders⁷.

Organising staff meetings

Hospitals have a large number of staff members working within them. As well as having many different departments. Organising staff meetings can, therefore, become a nightmare. These meetings are a crucial part of ensuring all departments are working well together and to provide the best treatment for patients.

Sending out an SMS with a meeting's details means that the recipient doesn't have to write down that information. Following up this with an SMS close to the time of the meeting will reduce the chance they'll forget to attend and will ensure the greatest attendance.

Shift rostering

With thousands of staff working around the clock in a hospital, there needs to be an efficient system for organising rosters. SMS can be automated to notify staff members when a shift needs to be filled. This takes the laborious task away from highly qualified nurses of having to call up staff that they think might want to take the shift. Or failing that, having to hire agency replacements; which are more expensive and less efficient.

Awareness programs

Hospitals can use SMS to promote health awareness programs. A good example of this was when Piedmont hospital in the US implemented an SMS strategy to educate women on the importance of self breast exams. Women would text "breast" to a specialised number and received SMS reminders monthly to conduct their self exam. They called it "BreastText." Other hospitals could successfully create similar SMS strategies to promote awareness about managing health conditions such as diabetes.

⁷ Medical Journal of Australia, 2005, "Use of SMS text messaging to improve outpatient attendance"



Motivation

Hospitals can lower their workload by implementing preventative measures with SMS. Promoting nutrition campaigns is a great example of this. A simple message which allows patients and the wider general public to opt in to receive nutrition information daily could be quite effective. For example, sending a message saying “text ‘nutrition’ to +61416906492 to receive all the info you need for a healthy diet” can encourage a healthy lifestyle and prevent illness, or help heal recovering patients.

Daily operations and finance

SMS messages can be scheduled to deliver financial reminders to patients for payments that are due or updates to insurance claims. This can prevent payment delays and save finance and administration staff valuable time.

If you already have a system that triggers emails to go out when payments are due or informing patients of their claims, you can add SMS functionality just as easily. So now when your emails are triggered, an SMS will also go out. This helps to increase response rates.

Staff communication with other departments

SMS can be used for staff to notify the hospital of issues that need to be resolved by other departments. This facilitates swift and easy resolution to problems, and allows smooth communication of responsibilities between departments. For example, if staff can notify maintenance via SMS when inventory is low, this will prevent any issues arising from a lack of supplies at a critical time.

Surgery preparation

Patients often have the responsibility to perform certain routines prior to surgical procedures. An example; fasting for 24 hours prior. SMS can be scheduled to remind patients of these critical routines, at the right time, which will aid successful surgery and recovery. Reassuring compliance and guaranteeing the best possible result.



Choosing a provider

The growth of SMS providers has been staggering in recent times, which is mainly due to its identification as a leading communication tool. It can therefore be difficult for hospitals to determine which provider is best suited to their business. The best SMS suppliers in Australia will be able to provide a number of distinguishing features and services. These features will help to maximise the potential of SMS for communicating within hospitals.

Direct connections to major networks

Delivery is the most important factor when determining the effectiveness of SMS. Strong connections will ensure the best delivery results. Try to make sure your provider has direct connections to the major networks. This will ensure the messages will make it to the recipient. If they are using off-shore connections—connecting to foreign networks in an attempt to get around connection fees—the chance of the message being delivered is hindered.

Customer service

While many SMS services are intuitive to use, it is reassuring to find a provider that will be able to assist with any difficulty that may be faced when implementing SMS communication strategies.

It is also important to find out if they have a team of customer service representatives located within Australia. This will help to ensure any issues are dealt with as soon as possible.

Ease of use

The purpose of SMS applications should be to simplify the communication process and reduce workload for staff, while increasing the scope and efficiency of communicating with patients and other stakeholders. SMS applications should be easily navigable and simple to use.

Make sure you take the free trial, which is offered by most SMS providers. Use this trial to its fullest, and make sure that you can send a message in the means required.

Integration with current preferences of operating systems

The best SMS providers will offer multiple avenues of incorporating SMS into the daily operations of hospitals, making implementing SMS a smooth transition. Multiple platforms could include having an online platform, supporting email to SMS and offering an API.

An SMS API allows SMS capabilities to be integrated into current systems and applications automatically. Not only do the top providers offer an SMS API, but they will also offer Software Development Kits (SDKs), in multiple development languages.



Reporting SMS delivery results

It's important that the status of an SMS sent can be tracked, this is especially true for messages with a critical nature. Understanding if the message was delivered makes organisations aware as to whether the communication needs to be escalated. For example, if you are sending an SMS to remind a patient to take important medication, and the message fails, this can trigger another response. Such as sending an SMS to the next of kin, or having a member of staff call the patient.

Message reporting is also very useful for marketing teams. It allows them to decipher the quality of their data and understand results obtained from SMS campaigns.

If all the necessary information is not accessible for medical staff or patients effective treatment may be hindered. There is also the possibility of sending thousands of messages to numbers that do not exist.

Experience with other hospitals

There is no substitute for years of experience and expertise. This is especially true when it comes to critical industries like healthcare. The most suitable SMS provider for a hospital will be one that has worked with other hospitals and delivered excellent results. They will have been established for a long time, and as such will be able to help implement strategies tailored for hospitals.

Esendex

Esendex is one of Australia's leading business SMS providers, with a focus on delivering high quality, secure and reliable services. Esendex holds one of the highest industry reputations for SMS provision. The company has over ten years of experience within the SMS industry, delivering a high-standard SMS solution to well over 20,000 customers.

Esendex boasts direct connections to the major networks in Australia, guaranteeing an exceptional delivery rate. The Service Level Agreement (SLA) is committed to 90% of messages being processed within five seconds and 95% within twenty seconds. Although this standard is largely exceeded, with delivery rates usually hitting around 98% and 99% within 5 and 20 seconds respectively.



Conclusion

Hospitals play a key role in maintaining a high standard of health and wellbeing in Australia, so communication within hospitals is important to ensure they fulfill their caretaking role.

Naturally, communication in hospitals faces barriers due to the size, and large variety of stakeholders in hospitals as organisations. SMS is the most efficient, ubiquitous and user friendly medium that can provide a solution to these barriers. It is the most reliable channel that can be trusted with aiding the smooth-running of such important institutions.

Questions? Get in touch



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