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Improving Communication between Patient-Party and the Hospital: A Sizeable Business Proposition?

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> "Generation X and Y had pioneered it. Millennials have championed it. The IT-revolution has systematically disseminated it. We are referring to Effective Communication and Objective Articulation of thoughts and information. We have come to live in such modern times where even 3-year-old kids can express their opinions and precise needs within Twitter-defined-character-limits. Why then are the most learned of professionals in the hospital business finding it increasingly difficult to relay an inpatient's health information to the relatives and caretakers of patients adequately?" asks Krishanu Bhattacharjee, as he dissects the business propositions around clinical communication systems.

Comprehending the Clinical Communication Conundrum

Of the plethora of issues that demand the immediate attention of hospital administrators, one core challenge is to ensure a seamless dialogue between the primary physician; the doctors-on-round; the doctors-on-call; and the patient-party of inpatients admitted in hospital wards.

Our line of work allows us to be in constant discussions with patients, clinicians, hospital admins, nursing staff and proprietors of healthcare facilities globally. In the 20+ countries and hundreds of clinical immersions over the years, what has been consistent is the varied levels of anxiety and dissatisfaction caused to patients and their caretakers by lack of real-time information download provided by the team of clinicians. The challenge is perhaps graver in emerging markets (not to be read as a generalization but certainly a

more acute observation) where cultural and infrastructural nuances continue playing an important role towards less-effective communication.

Patients admitted in various wards – be it a high acuity ward / critical care or the general wards are subject to frequent physiological changes based on their condition, age, impact of medication and therapy as well as the general level of care. While the patient remains the centre of the universe for the caregivers and clinicians, the immediate relatives and attendants of the patient continue to be subjected to anxiety, and lack of clarity about the patient's progress leading to significant loss of productive time and the ability to make financial plans where payment is out-of-pocket. In an ideal world, providing real-time knowledge of the patient's condition and the next steps towards therapy, relief or discharge should be an elemental service line for the patient's relatives / attendants. The real world though is yet to affranchise the status quo around truncated clinical communication.

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Visualizing the Bigger Picture

Patient-party dissatisfaction is one side of the coin. The other side however reveals a sombre picture of the current flow of information between the team of clinicians who are required to juggle between wards spread across different floors, OPD consultations, and their respective administrative responsibilities. With hospitals investing millions on digital transformation, operational consolidation, patient experience and branding, solving the information-flow problem should feature right at the top of priority charts.

Formulating a Business Model

Empathy aside, there is higher revenue potential in Clarity-business as against Confusion-business. Offering an optional service where patient's attendants are provided with daily progress updates of the patient, the interpretation of test results and its impact on the patient's immediate health, changing prognosis and possible discharge timelines is a monetizable proposition. The information doesn't necessarily have to be disseminated in complete layman's vernacular. WebMD's of the world have demonstrated significant penetration and reach into the smartphones ensuring higher cognitive ability among the masses to assimilate basic medical information. The frequency and mode of dissemination of such clinical information through secure means could be customized based on the specific needs of the patients as well as the schedule of the patient's attendants.

There is always a business model to create ROI:

Clinical information systems by top med-tech firms have made it to even small and medium-sized hospitals of 50-100 beds globally. High acuity software suites are solving complex shift-handover issues, improving post-op assessments, customizing nutrition therapies for patients and limiting medical errors in ICUs around the world. Hypothetically speaking, the patient-progress-update module could simply be an extension of such software suites, only to be expanded to low-acuity / general wards and to be disseminated to patient attendants who are willing to opt for the services at a certain fee.

Transformation is already underway:

Several clinical communication and collaboration platforms are already bringing about a transformation in terms of bedside reporting and nurse leader rounding, thus reinforcing treatment plans and ensuring compliance. Certain hospitals in the US have even reported improved patient satisfaction, loyalty and HCAHPS ratings by implementing best practices that foster improved communication with patients and their caregivers. With over 421 million hospitalizations globally, even the most conservative of addressable market estimates for such patient-progress-modules could usher investment-worthy confidence.

For an industry where empathy is as critical as cutting edge technology or a physician's real-life experiences, ensuring a human connect at each step of cure is pivotal to its very evolution.

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About the author:

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Krishanu is the Founder & CEO at EMeRG. He has spent a decade-and-a-half in the medical technology industry spearheading research and consulting studies. He is passionate about solving the paradox of "innovation in isolation" in emerging markets for medical device users by assisting innovative NPIs. Krishanu possesses keen understanding of medical device markets globally; having led in-depth field research, outcomes and market access research as well as strategy workshops across US, ASEAN, Africa, Middle East, South America and Europe.

To discuss ideas that enable product innovation and actionable marketing programs for medical devices, please reach out to him at krishanu.b@emerg-inc.com.

About EMeRG – The medical devices and diagnostics advisory firm:

EMeRG is a fast growing, business consulting firm, with tailored solutions for med-tech and health-tech companies. We are a team of management consultants and health transformation specialists that design solutions and services for on-point decision making and strategy for the CXO. Process re-engineering, customer voice mapping, and fluidic decision blueprinting are the core engines of our offerings-matrix.

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