How Technology Can Improve Hands-On Patient Care

Even though we’d never turn our backs on the incredible technological and clinical breakthroughs we’ve experienced in healthcare, many professional caregivers lament that there’s never enough time to provide the level of personal care patients truly require.

Effective clinician and patient relationships include warmth, familiarity and a personal touch. These are important functions that allow a nurse to properly attend to the patient’s health and recovery. The more time we spend by the patient’s bedside, the more we hear, see and sense about his or her needs. There’s nothing that replaces the nurse’s touch and attention, especially at a time of crisis. We answer questions that might otherwise go unasked, and we observe more subtle behaviors and symptoms. Some aspects of that coveted level of attention and care have been lost to the fast-paced and stressful environments we see in hospitals today.

The bar is being raised and we are challenged to conduct hourly rounds and have to quickly assess up to 45 patients or more. With such little time to spread across numerous patients, how can a healthy patient-nurse dynamic exist? And more important, how can we make sure patients are getting the proper attention and care, clinically and emotionally?

Ironically, technology is providing a way to get back to some of the positive aspects of the past; specifically, personalized care. Through technology solutions like interactive patient education and engagement solutions, patients can receive customized education in order to better understand symptoms, diagnoses and their recovery. A highly focused, proactive flow of information to patients can curb the nurses’ time spent educating the patient and his or her family. This also encourages patients to take a greater role in understanding their condition and the elements necessary for a healthful recovery. And with today’s interactive feedback systems, nurses can track what their patients watch, assess comprehension through a simple interactive quiz administered electronically, and then focus on areas that are confusing or unclear to their patients. With another nod to the past, the key portals for these capabilities are hospital room TVs.

So, with time freed up by technology, nurses are able to focus more on hands-on clinical interactions. This improves our chances of noticing symptoms that may have been missed due to less patient interaction. Also, patients are empowered to play a larger role in their recovery thanks to increased access to relevant and timely information that’s been customized specifically for their illness or condition.

There’s another benefit nurses would experience from this increased hands-on service. Nurses tell me all the time how they’re feeling the effects of stress from increased workloads and pressure. The consequences manifest in various health issues including weight gain, problems sleeping, less patience at home, and less resistance to illness. As the saying goes, “to help others you must first help yourself.” Caregivers in our hospitals must be able to care for themselves, too, so they can perform their jobs to the best of their abilities.

Only a few hospitals currently use advanced technology solutions for patient education, though the interest is growing rapidly and the incentives for implementation are growing. A more concerted focus on integrated patient-engagement systems is a win-win for nurses, for patients and their families, and for improving the entire hospital experience. Hospitals using these tools are demonstrating returns on investment in improved HCAHPS scores, patient satisfaction ratings and clinical outcomes, including a reduction in preventable readmissions. It’s even had a positive impact on nurse retention. The increased one-on-one efforts made possible through improved workflows, time-saving electronic reporting, more focused education, and feedback systems contribute to the patients’ sense that they are in good, caring hands. And from the nurses’ perspective, that includes having the opportunity to get back to the best aspects of old-fashioned care and caring, which often is the magnet that draws us to this profession in the first place.