Today's Trends in Healthcare Televisions

By Megan Headley

The television is a centerpiece in many a home living room, but it's also become an indispensable part of hospital patient rooms. For many patients, hospital stays are about waiting, and a TV is one avenue for relieving boredom. Today's healthcare TVs, however, go much further than that by becoming an integral part of the admission process.

David Prickett, marketing manager for TeleHealth Services in Raleigh, N.C., notes that there are two directives pushing the evolution of healthcare TV,

"Certainly all the new healthcare mandates are driving some of this. Patient satisfaction is important, so that's [leading to] larger screens, on-demand entertainment and high definition: those features can influence patient satisfaction scores. But then there are also the efforts to reduce readmission. Comprehensive TV solutions streamline the process for delivering patient education and help hospitals enable patients to care for themselves post-discharge. Better-informed patients are less likely to be readmitted. Increased patient satisfaction and reduced readmissions are critical factors in maximizing reimbursements," Prickett says.

What's On-Screen

TV providers note that today's units offer patients more options in entertainment,

"We're seeing 'bring your own content,' so to speak," says Timothy Wright, director of commercial healthcare for LG Electronics USA. "There are systems out there that allow caregivers or sometimes family members to bring their own content." One potential drawback for facility managers (FMs), he notes, is that this content has to be monitored very closely.

"You have to make sure it is secure content and that it's not going anywhere but to the intended viewer," he says.

But according to Prickett, hospital TVs have evolved past simply providing entertainment. "They provide a powerful portal for delivering a wide variety of relevant content and information," he says. He's seeing these products as integral components to solutions that address workflow, patient engagement and even service recovery within a hospital. "It's more than just something you would watch for entertainment purposes; it addresses patient care in very meaningful ways."

According to representatives of the Krames StayWell patient education product team, "Pushing patient education — often through video relevant to the patient condition — and prepping for discharge is a growing demand. More and more are asking for learning verification, both in terms of documenting that the education was viewed but also a Q&A to verify it was understood."

Wright notes that patients and visitors also are able to interact with healthcare TVs in ways that they've been able to for years in more "comfortable" accommodations: hotels. LG's ProCentric platform is one that provides a patient guide that shows local attractions, houses of worship, etc. "That type of content can be put on the television. The facility does save some money, in that admissions have these physical books and [instead of] updating them from time to time it can all be done from a remote location and for all TVs at once."

He notes that these TVs also feature an electronic interactive program guide. "The interactive program guide is a very useful and appreciated tool in the hospital environment because most of the patients are looking at a channel lineup that is different from what they have at home. This is a very quick way for them to scroll using the pillow speaker through a guide of what's on, and select their programming and find out more about that," Wright says.

Wright notes that many emerging programs today allow FMs to manage the channel lineup and content delivery from one location, including directing zoned programming to where it is needed. "It's a time-saver," he says.

Plugging In

TV hardware itself is changing in ways that FMs should note.

"The newer, smaller, flat, industrial-designed LED and LCD products are really where we're seeing a lot of physical hardware upgrades," Wright says. "When these systems first launched to the marketplace seven to eight years ago, due to the commercial features and limited number, they were very expensive. However, with manufacturing yields going up worldwide on the panels because of the consumer demand and increased competition, these prices have corrected downward. Now facilities are upgrading to the larger-screen products because of the price points, as well as because of interactive system providers."

According to Wright, companies that use interactive features to collect medical information find that it's easier for patients to process the large quantities of content on the screen when that screen is, at a minimum, 32 inches. "32-inch screen size is about the smallest we're seeing in that application. And the majority of them are moving to 40- and 42-inch," Wright says.

"They're certainly larger," Prickett agrees. "Over the last several years the sizes of the healthcare TVs inside the patient rooms are expanding along with the content patients can view on them. Increasingly, hospitals are looking at 40- to 42-inch

screens.*

In addition to the screen itself, FMs may be seeing changes in the infrastructure.

“Most hospital TV systems [used/still use] coaxial cable, for instance, and so the TV system infrastructure was separate from the general hospital IT environment. Now with increasing interest in IPTV we’re using data cable, so you’re introducing that hospital TV system into the overall IT network. More and more often the systems are being supported at a different level within the hospital, and are transitioning from facilities and maintenance type management to the IT environment,” Prickett says.

LG is one such company making this move. The company is preparing to launch a series of what Wright calls “smart TVs.” “Smart is a word that is thrown around a lot, but a smart TV is basically a TV that will allow for IT content input, as opposed to the coaxial guide. With these technologies, it’s much easier for interactive system partners to import their content and their technology into our product, as opposed to off-board options,” he says. “The IT-based products are something we’re starting to see as a trend.”

Future Programming

Not ready to upgrade? Then consider the next direction for healthcare TVs.

“For the patient room, I think the trend is systems that are simpler to use and navigate,” Wright predicts. “There are several out there that work very well but, depending on the condition of the end-user, they can be somewhat complex to manipulate.”

Wright also notes that content is becoming more abundant, particularly as emerging companies move toward providing up-to-date, digitally stored medical content that is quicker and easier to access than ever.

About the Author

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