CASE STUDY

Sparrow Health fulfills its promise to patient care with all-patient approach to discharge calls

Sparrow Health fulfills its promise to patient care with all-patient approach to discharge calls

Situation

As the largest health care system in the region, Sparrow Health has earned a reputation for quality care, service excellence and high integrity among patients in the mid-Michigan region. Attributed largely to what the organization refers to as *"The Sparrow Way,"* it requires:

> *Defining, deploying and adhering to patient-centered and evidence-based best practices in a culturally sensitive manner, to reduce non-value added process variation and deliver national benchmark-level outcomes on a consistent and sustainable basis.*

Foremost to Sparrow, the needs of the patient must always come first. To put this promise into practice, Sparrow Health leadership felt strongly that **every inpatient, emergency department and ambulatory surgery patient discharged should receive a follow up phone call.** Not only was this the right thing to do for the patient, it also provided critical visibility into gaps in the delivery of care that impact patient outcomes.

In 2012 after considerable research, Sparrow Health implemented an evidence-based, internal discharge call process that emphasized the consistency and quality of each call. To do so, Sparrow Health invested in:

- Training and requiring over 700 nurses to conduct the post discharge calls
- Purchasing discharge call software to drive accountability among staff and act as a warehouse to store patient feedback

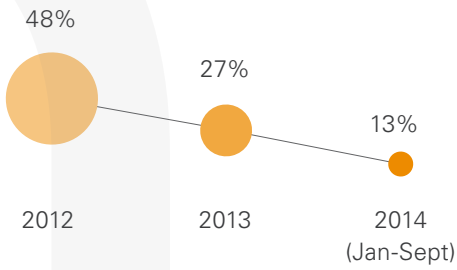
Initially Sparrow Health achieved patient contact rates of **48 percent in 2012.** However, the program relied on internal personnel, taking high-value staff away from delivering care. As a result, Sparrow Health's discharge call program began losing momentum. **By 2014, patient contact rates declined to 13 percent.** There was little confidence that patient issues were being effectively resolved and valuable patient transition information was not being collected or circulated to leadership to be used for process improvement.

Concerned about the significant decline in patient contact rates, the cost of the program and its impact on the commitment to evidence-based, patient-centered care, Sparrow Health began to investigate other options—including outsourcing patient discharge calls.

Importance of post discharge calls

- Ensure patients make a safe transition
- Remove barriers for patient
- Prevent readmissions
- Improve patient satisfaction and loyalty

With Sparrow Health's internal discharge call process, patient contact rates were declining and difficult to sustain.



"With NRC Health Transitions, we are able to very quickly contact patients, identify any patient concern and trends, and start to rectify situations and/or remove barriers to a smooth transition from the hospital—making sure that the patient is safe, their experience was excellent, and even thank them for their business."

Terry Rose, RN, MHA
Director, Patient Experience Department

Solution

In 2014, Sparrow Health made the decision to partner with NRC Health Transitions, to revitalize its patient discharge call program and ensure several key attributes were in place:

01

FREQUENCY

Ensures all patients receive a phone call 24–72 hours post discharge

While the majority of patients will make a safe and healthy transition from the hospital, research shows that on average 20% of patients are high-risk and require additional follow up care. However, high patient volumes and low availability of non-patient care nursing time make it nearly impossible to reach out to all patients and identify the high-risk patients to ensure they transition safely.

By partnering with Transitions, Sparrow Health had the assurance that every patient would receive a discharge call. Additionally, Sparrow Health would have access to tools that would provide immediate visibility to high-risk patients.

02

QUALITY

Structure to quickly resolve patient issues and effectively collect patient feedback

With Transitions, Sparrow Health was able to reduce the manpower needed to effectively conduct post discharge calls to every patient, from 700 nurses across the system to one Patient Navigator. Sparrow Health was also able to create a process where it could be confident that all patient barriers were addressed effectively and escalated appropriately—with patient feedback collected immediately, within hours of the patient experience.

Sparrow Health and the Transitions process:

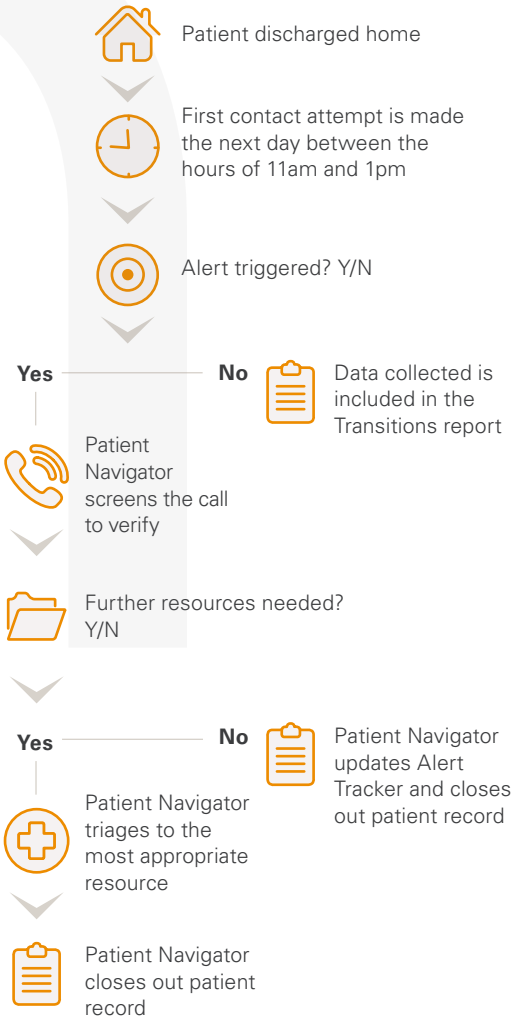
- The Transitions platform reaches out to 100% of inpatient, emergency department and ambulatory surgery patients discharged from Sparrow Health.
- On average, 21% of patients communicate that they require additional follow up regarding a clinical or service issue.
- Only one Patient Navigator is needed to make the initial follow up with these patients and resolves the majority of issues within one phone call.

Contact rates with internal process vs. with NRC Health Transitions

BEFORE TRANSITIONS
13% of discharge phonecalls were made

AFTER TRANSITIONS
100% of discharge phonecalls were made

NRC Health Transitions discharge call flow



03

PROCESS IMPROVEMENT

Collect and circulate data, trending and reports to identify and address gaps in delivery of care

Post discharge calls are proven to have a significant impact on patient outcomes, readmission rates and patient satisfaction scores. Prior to partnering with NRC Health, patient feedback was held at the individual staff member or unit level. Combined with the low patient contact rates, data was statistically irrelevant or insignificant enough to drive change within the organization.

By partnering with Transitions, Sparrow Health has immediate visibility to data and trending to drive internal process improvement, including:

- Narrowing the focus to only those patients with barriers or service issues post discharge. Now, Sparrow Health gains an immediate and clear view to gaps in the delivery of care.
- Using timely and comprehensive reporting tools. Now, Sparrow is able to trend performance over time, benchmark with best-in-class organizations and disseminate information throughout the system.

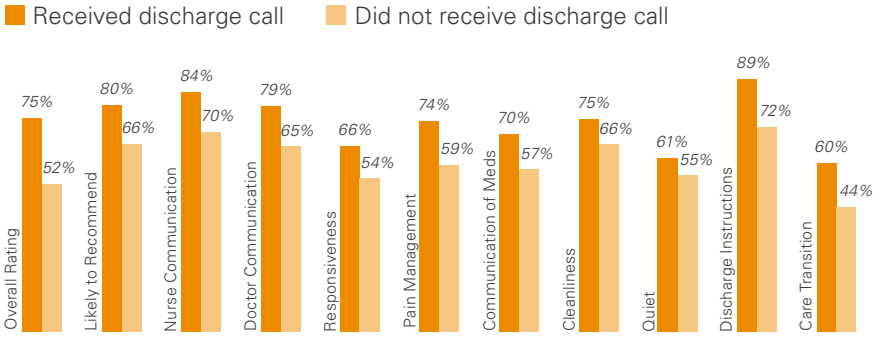
04

HCAHPS IMPROVEMENT

Enhance the patient experience and patient satisfaction scores

Sparrow Health has always understood the significant impact post discharge calls have on the patient experience, with external and internal research supporting that patients who receive a post discharge call rate the hospital significantly higher than those that do not receive a phone call. **By partnering with Transitions, Sparrow Health is able to systematically reach the majority of patients with follow-up calls and has seen the desired impact in improved HCAHPS scores.**

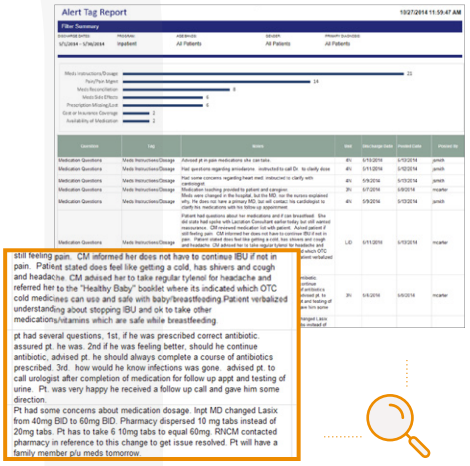
Sparrow Health Impact on HCAHPS



NRC Health Transitions reports provide Sparrow Health with data that drives ongoing process improvement

Patient outreach alerts

Alert tag report



Medicine instructions

Takeaways

The initial post discharge call from NRC Health Transitions shows patients that Sparrow Health is true to its commitment of putting the patient first.

SPARROW HEALTH FINDINGS:

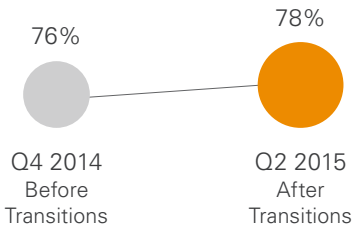
01

Patients appreciate the initial follow up and are more likely to rate their experience a 9 or 10 and recommend the hospital to family and friends.

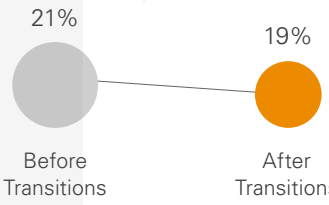
02

Access to immediate patient feedback allows for the improvement on the delivery of care and the reduction of the number of patients that require follow up post discharge.

HCAHPS would recommend scores



High risk patients



High-risk patients that do require follow-up from Sparrow Health provide the organization with valuable insight, spurring changes that significantly impact HCAHPS scores.

> *For example, within weeks of implementing Transitions, Sparrow Health had access to the necessary data to identify and address multiple patient issues including medications and putting a Lean task force in place to resolve internal gaps in processes. For medication issues outside the control of the hospital, such as the patient's inability to pay for prescriptions, the Patient Navigator was able to put a process in place that ensured these patients were directed to the right resources and their prescriptions filled.*

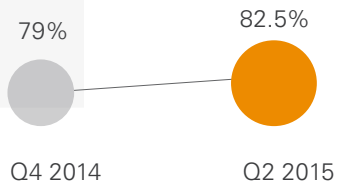
As a result, Sparrow Health has seen a **significant drop in the number of patient alerts indicating issues with medications and an increase in HCAHPS scores for that domain.** And Sparrow Health continues to make the most of the information and feedback it gains from patient discharge calls to support its ability to remain true to the promise of providing evidence-based, patient-centered best practices.

Feedback showed Sparrow Health that patients did not perceive the transition of care process to be patient-centered

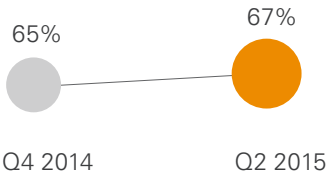
	Common themes identified by patients	Actions taken
	Challenges filling prescriptions	Medication questions triaged immediately to pharmacy
	Issues understanding prescriptions	Formed a discharge medication task force
	Follow up appointments not made and care referrals not confirmed	Appointments and care referrals appointments confirmed by case managers
	Inadequacies in communication from physicians	Physician communication training

Sparrow Health was provided with data and trending that led to improvements in processes regarding explaining medications to patients; resulting in higher HCAHPS scores in 6 months

Explaining Medication



Overall Medication Composite



FOR MORE ABOUT
NRC HEALTH TRANSITIONS
Call 800.388.4264 or visit nrchealth.com.

For 35 years, NRC Health has been committed to achieving human understanding. We enable healthcare organizations to know the people they care for with greater clarity, immediacy, and depth. Our partners are able to illuminate and improve the key moments that define an experience and build trust. Guided by our uniquely empathic heritage, proprietary methods, skilled associates, and holistic approach, we help our partners design experiences that exceed expectations, inspire loyalty, and improve well-being among patients, residents, physicians, nurses, and staff.

NRC Health helps healthcare organizations better understand the people they care for and design experiences that inspire loyalty.

1 800 388 4264 | nrchealth.com
1245 Q Street | Lincoln, Nebraska | 68508

nrc HEALTH