Healthcare: Choosing the Right Visitor Management Solution

Strategic Intent for Healthcare Visitor Management

FROST & SULLIVAN EXECUTIVE BRIEF

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Introduction

Mounting evidence indicates healthcare organization visitor management is rapidly becoming one of healthcare's most challenging operational and security requirements.

In the United States, the myriad visitor management and physical security standards required of health systems, hospitals, and stand-alone clinics continue to grow. Gaining access to a healthcare facility has become more of a technology-driven process using temporary visitor badges, QR codes, self-service kiosks, turnstiles, and staffed check-in locations. These solutions security guards and a workforce-driven strategy. As city, state, and federal regulations evolve, ever-changing requirements such as the need for RFID[1] and active low-energy Bluetooth for equipment connectivity, scanners, and mobile devices that use cloud-based platforms to communicate with objects directly are now considered the norm. The digital transformation of healthcare organizations' visitor management systems requires a strategic intent that integrates physical plant security measures with clinical operational access control. Compliance- and technology-driven security methods are being extrapolated in near-real time to meet visitor management, staff and patient safety, and physical security requirements. Visitor management solutions should offer organizations the ability to customize tactics to meet their unique needs. The overarching goal of this integration is to provide the best, most secure, and intuitive visitor experience supported by innovative patient workflows. Moreover, each healthcare organization should be able to readily connect physical access control with other identity management systems to enable innovative secure access control systems.

1   RFID (radio frequency identification) is a form of wireless communication that incorporates electromagnetic or electrostatic coupling in the radio frequency portion of the electromagnetic spectrum to uniquely identify an object, animal, or person.

This *Executive Brief* will illustrate how third-party professional vendors can assist US healthcare organizations in safeguarding their staff and visitors through better control over facility access management. Many lessons were learned during the COVID-19 pandemic, when organizations were forced to limit access to avoid visitor contact with infected patients and overcrowding. Hospital security departments and preventive medicine professionals were forced to innovate and discover the value of managing visitor traffic as the pandemic escalated. By adopting integrated, intelligent patient-visitor management solutions, hospitals were able to support patient well-being and create a safe, compliant, and much more efficient ecosystem for patients, hospital staff, and visitors.

The Complex Nature of Healthcare Facility Visitor Management

To ensure all patients and visitors have a safe and successful experience, hospital security depends on a well-organized staff supported by innovative and intelligent visitor management procedures. A hospital's collective offering should provide safe and comfortable environments—for both staff and patients. One of the most significant way hospitals can address patient and staff safety as well as their unique operational needs is by properly overseeing the workflow and intelligently controlling visitor access.

The starting point is adopting and implementing an intelligent and robust visitor management solution to protect patients, their families, and other visitors; hospital staff; volunteers; contractors; and vendors alike.

Visitor management solutions for healthcare organizations introduce the procedural and technological tools required to effectively register, record access, and track visitors who enter healthcare facilities. Typically, these individuals are neither assigned to nor work for the hospital; they are visiting patients or conducting business within the facility. For hospitals with inpatients, however, visitor management addresses the patient safety in addition to registering visitors, medical supply contractors, and healthcare vendors whose access must be documented and monitored. Having a reliable and proven visitor management system in place provides many organizational efficiencies and security measures that go far in reducing safety risks and challenges.

Yet most visitor management systems on the market today are not designed with an understanding of hospitals' unique needs. Hospitals face many complex challenges in overseeing physical plant access requirements for a plethora of visitor types whose needs often change within hours. Of upmost priority for hospitals is typically to prevent the spread of infectious diseases; deliver a smooth, consumer-friendly check-in procedure; and create a safe environment for staff, visitors, and patients.

Security Challenges in the Healthcare Industry

Hospitals face an overwhelming number of potential and continuous environmental threats to staff members, patients, and hospital property. These can include physical encounters; attempts to steal medical supplies, controlled substances, and drugs; illegal access to patients under police protection; and unauthorized entrance to sensitive areas of the hospital power plant. These threats strain hospital security teams and administrators who must find a balance between blocking potential dangers and not disrupting the daily flow of people and hospitality they try to foster to facilitate a comfortable healing environment.

Hospitals struggle with four key visitor safety and security challenges today: creating a safe staff and visitor environment; adapting to changing health mandates due to infectious diseases; improving the efficiency of patient and visitor workflows, especially in times of high traffic; and adhering to mounting state and federal compliance regulations.

EXHIBIT 1: Hospital Visitor Challenges

Creating a Safe Environment

Regulatory Compliance

Hospital Visitor Challenges

Improving Patient Workflow Efficiency

Preventing Infectious Disease Transmission

Source: Frost & Sullivan

Visitor Access – Patient and Staff Safety

Hospital operations now prioritize patient safety and physical security, requiring accountability for who enters and exits their facilities. An unauthorized person who did not pass through a screening procedure and/or registration point could make patients feel unsafe or possibly expose them to physical threats. The consequences of such an encounter could result in both criminal and civil legal action a patient takes against the hospital. Moreover, the hospital brand and reputation would suffer damages to its public relations. Staff safety is another priority, one that grows with each new headline of an active shooter tragedy or disgruntled patient or employee who pursued violent restitution over an employment or personnel disagreement. Without reservation, the number of healthcare organization-related assaults involving staff continues to grow annually. This imminent threat to healthcare staff provided impetus for the American Hospital Association to request the Department of Justice to author legislation that would provide healthcare workers relief from physical threats and social media intimidation.[2]
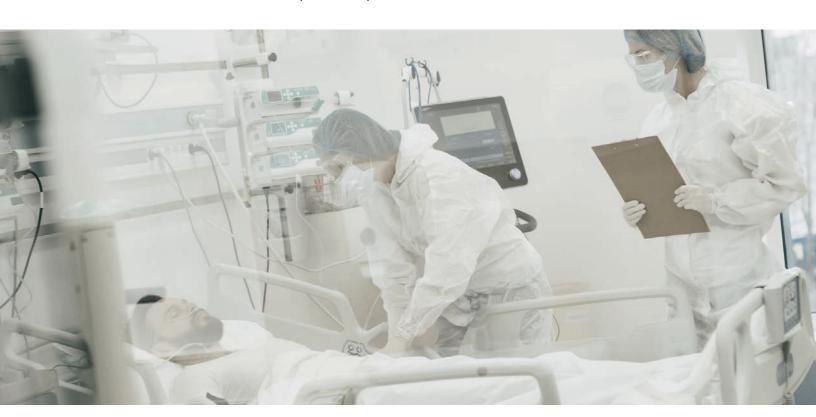
2   June 7, 2022. Reps. Madeleine Dean, D-Pa., and Larry Bucshon, R-Ind., introduced the Safety from Violence for Healthcare Employees Act, AHA-supported legislation that would give healthcare workers the same legal protections against assault and intimidation that flight crews and airport workers have under federal law.

Hospitals must also address unique legal safeguarding issues above and beyond providing a safe environment for staff and patients. For example, patients who are victims of domestic violence must remain protected from unauthorized visitors who legally should not have access to them, even if related. Concurrently, hospitals must allow patients access to family, social workers, and community advocates when they require particular support. For example, hospital staff often must coordinate with child care services for patients who require this assistance while hospitalized.

Ensuring Infectious Diseases Are Not Spread to Visitors and Staff

Improving access control is an ongoing preventive effort among hospitals to better protect their staff from exposure to contagious and infectious diseases. The COVID-19 pandemic spurred an overnight paradigm shift and need for a much more comprehensive standard of care to prevent transmission of the virus among hospital staff and visitors. Minimizing the spread of infection in hospitals remains ongoing, but not to the level experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic when hospital staff and patients were suddenly thrust into a highly contagious ecosystem that required immediate new measures to prevent epidemic disease transmission conditions.
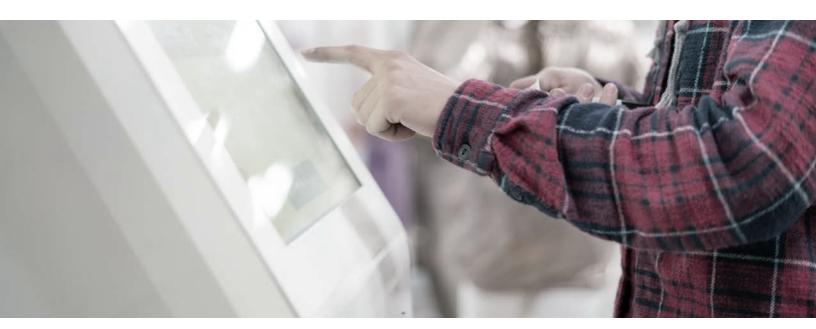
Workflow Efficiency and Ability to Adapt to Surges in Patient Volume

Workflow efficiency is a top priority for hospitals, especially in admitting patients and granting visitors access. Poorly devised admission policies and ineffective visitor tracking procedures that govern how visitors gain access and navigate once inside the facility add to the anxiety patients experience and can extend treatment time considerably and unnecessarily. For instance, not knowing if the hospital is safe and doing everything it can in terms of isolating contagious patients and staff prevented thousands of people from having surgeries during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Hospitals are now working hard to become much more efficient in adopting visitor authorization processes designed to enhance the patient registration experience. The introduction of technologies that help make all patients and visitors feel safer reflects progress being made in establishing an environment of mutual trust.

Hospitals are no longer stand-alone facilities; almost all are part of a larger health system, often inclusive of multiple facilities and separate medical campuses. This means the organizational structure of these campuses includes an array of medical facilities with distinct roles, such as emergency departments, imaging centers, patient wards, clinical laboratories, and a growing number of visitor-restricted areas that require much more stringent access limitations. However, most of today's visitor management systems possess neither the advanced technology needed to effectively oversee these complex healthcare entities nor the capability needed to expand visitor management infrastructure across multiple disbursed locations, each with unique needs.

This lack of scalability and technology prevents whole health systems from effectively addressing the increasing volume of visitors and the ongoing need to avoid prolonging already lengthy and frustrating patient wait times. As a result, security suffers and keeps these facilities from growing and delivering more medical services to their communities.

Compliance in an Expanding Visitor Management Environment

The final visitor control conundrum hospitals encounter is regulatory compliance. US healthcare delivery is regulated by extensive and complex mandates. All healthcare organizations must adhere to a structured index of standards, including the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), Centers for Disease Control (CDC) regulations, Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO), and the International Association for Healthcare Security and Safety (IAHSS). In addition, hospitals, independent physician practices, clinics, and payors must comply with Health Level Seven (HL7), which is a set of global universal standards for the electronic transfer of unique and specific clinical administrative data between health IT software applications.

Complying with all regulatory standards places massive administrative and operational burden on hospitals, and these standards evolve as technology adapts and improves. In addition, compliance is tested when environmental and public health crises emerge, such as what happened during the COVID-19 pandemic. As new clinical and administrative compliance issues emerged in real time, standards had to be adapted accordingly.

The Promise of Intelligent Visitor Management

Digitizing visitor management processes—including verifying identity, screening for legal visitation restrictions, and issuing unique trackable access badges—and standardizing security policies will improve the execution of campus-wide security standards. This enables the seamless extension of secure processes across new structures and clinics as healthcare organizations expand their medical capabilities. Digitally authorizing visitors' access according to the nature of their business improves

front-desk efficiency by streamlining the pre-registration process. It also improves security measures by automating visitor verification, physical and database screening, and trackable identification badge issuance.

Solid, well-executed security procedures support positive experiences for both patients and visitors alike. They provide value and peace of mind that builds trust between the hospital and community it serves. Hospitals should prioritize securing the funding needed to digitally transform their security and visitor control efforts when choosing a visitor management solution.

EXHIBIT 2: Intelligent Patient Visitor System Attributes

Enables patient-specific visitation allowances to better designate visitor lists for each patient	Restricts visitors from gaining access to off-limits areas and enables contract tracing and reports as needed
Reduce lobby queuing for patient visitors, outpatients, business and other visitors with self-service kiosks and pre-check-in workflows	Creates seamless access for visitors based on relationship with patient
Creates interoperability and digital connection with all EHR platforms (e.g., Epic, Cerner, Allscripts, Meditech) to access a patient's real-time location using HL7-based integration, which will seamlessly direct visitors to the correct location	Integrates comprehensively with major physical access control programs, emergency – hospital active directories, emails, and internal and external facility watch lists

Benefits of Intelligent Visitor Management Solutions

Optimal visitor management solutions will provide healthcare organization end users with the ability to process visitors rapidly via user-friendly patient-workflow designs. This will undoubtedly improve front-desk efficiency by digitally transforming the pre-registration procedures that enhance security with automated verification, digital screening, and efficient and timely access badge issuance.

Shifting to a more efficient digital visitor management platform will improve a healthcare organization's compliance with HL7 standards of data exchange across multiple EHR platforms.

Well-established, proven digital visitor management platforms should empower a hospital campus or larger health system to build or acquire new facilities and seamlessly coordinate hundreds of new patient interface points across multiple facilities. This scalability component will introduce a cutting-edge process to manage visitors and subsequently establish community rapport and trust among patients. Involving patients in the onboarding process will also improve patient satisfaction scores by empowering families to better control and manage their visitation policy.

Ultimately, the task of securing a healthcare organization facility falls upon hospital leadership. Intelligent visitor management solutions should offer a broad range of comprehensive yet adaptable choices for busy hospital lobby entrances. This approach will enable healthcare organizations, big and small, to provide a lasting first impression among all visitors and empower them with the ability to monitor multiple professional identities, such as contractors and sales vendors. These value-adding solutions will create an overarching view of all visitors by integrating the hospital identity, human resources, and other security systems using multiple online digital options.

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