

ReInforced Care™ Case Study – Milton Hospital

Quick Summary

Customer: Milton Hospital, with 81 beds and 250 physicians

Challenge: Improve post-discharge patient follow-up process to facilitate patient recovery and reduce readmission rates

Solution: ReInforced Care PM360™

Key Results:

- Lowered readmission rate by 10 percent
- Reduced number of patient recovery issues by providing immediate feedback
- Enabled faster interventions and process improvements

The Challenge: Enhance Follow-Up Patient Services and Reduce Readmissions

For more than 100 years, Milton Hospital has improved the health of the communities it serves. Providing high-quality, personalized health care with compassion, dignity and respect, the hospital presently has 250 physicians on staff with 81 beds and a complete compliment of inpatient and outpatient health services as well as 24-hour emergency services.

As part of the on-going effort to provide the highest level of patient care, Milton Hospital sought to enhance its post-discharge patient follow-up service. Administrators wanted to check sooner and more often on the well-being of patients to confirm care instructions given by physicians were being followed properly.

“Post-discharge telephone calls from the hospital make a big difference to patients,” said Lynn Cronin, BSN RN and Director of Operations for Milton Hospital. “But allocating hospital resources to conduct the initial calls as well as follow-up calls requires extra staffing as well as software to manage the program. Our nurse managers already have heavy workloads, so we needed another resource we could turn to.”

In addition to enhancing patient services, Milton Hospital also wanted to conduct post-discharge calls to reduce the number of readmissions. Nationally, the readmission rate for hospitals is approximately 20 percent, and experts estimate that 75 percent of readmissions are avoidable.¹ Responding to this trend, Milton Hospital realized it could discover if patients were not properly following post-discharge care instructions and possibly prevent the need for return trips to the hospital by collecting immediate feedback after discharge.

The hospital also realized it needed to comply with the federal government’s Affordable Care Act. This included the regulation that hospitals exceeding expected readmission rates will have Medicare inpatient payments reduced starting in 2013, with data collection beginning in 2011. “Knowing that it can take an extended amount of time to launch successful programs that comply properly with complex federal regulations, we wanted to get a jump on the process,” Cronin said.

The Solution: ReInforced Care PM360™

To help take on the challenges of conducting post-discharge patient phone calls and reducing the readmission rate, Milton Hospital turned to ReInforced Care. As experts in patient-experience management with unique, cost-effective, and scalable patient outreach approaches, ReInforced Care helps hospitals quickly and easily improve the quality of care following patient discharge, which leads to reduced readmissions.

“ReInforced Care combines expertise in devising, executing and managing customer outreach programs with in-depth healthcare industry knowledge,” Cronin said. “We partnered with them because of how well they demonstrated their understanding of the challenges we face in

communicating with patients as well as their willingness to adapt their services to match our approach and processes.”

ReInforced Care recommended that Milton Hospital deploy the PM360 Patient Experience Management Proactive Outreach Program. PM360 is an education-based communication methodology that reinforces discharge instructions provided by hospital care providers and offers an escalation path back to hospitals for patients that need assistance from a medical professional. The service includes alerting providers about patients who may be at risk for re-hospitalization and helps prevent costly emergency room visits by linking patients with appropriate networks and care providers.

For Milton Hospital, PM360 provides the resources to place follow-up calls to patients one day after they are discharged followed by additional calls over the course of the next 30 days. In an average month, ReInforced Care contacts 260 patients four times each to confirm how well they are recovering. ReInforced Care personnel closely follow a script of questions created by Milton Hospital that helps determine if patients are properly following instructions or if any deviations are occurring.

“Patients sometimes simply misunderstand instructions, so it’s important to find out early,” Cronin said. “And over time, the process has allowed us to learn how to modify the questions so that we can continue to improve the quality of the data collected.”

PM360 also features software technology that categorizes and prioritizes patient responses based on criteria established by Milton Hospital so that staff knows which patients need immediate attention. The data collected during each patient call is entered into the PM360 database maintained by ReInforced Care and transferred to the hospital’s data center twice per day. This allows hospital management to quickly review reports and attend to patients that need immediate help. With a new secure portal that ReInforced Care made available to Milton Hospital, data is now available in real time for review and management by the hospital.

“And for any patients that need immediate help, ReInforced Care has created a system where we receive an immediate call that also triggers a page,” Cronin said. “This allows us to respond quickly to alleviate urgent situations.”

The Results: Reduced Patient Issues and Lower Readmission Rates

“With the PM360 program, we have reduced our readmission rate by 10 percent since partnering with ReInforced Care,” Cronin said. “This reduction has happened largely because ReInforced Care allows us to contact patients sooner to find out if they are running into any problems, such as trying to fill a prescription or misunderstanding instructions. By calling them soon after discharge occurs, we can prevent some patients from having to return to the hospital.”

Cronin adds that ReInforced Care strives to comply with Milton Hospital’s style and approach to healthcare. “They were very flexible about adapting their solution to meet our needs at the beginning, but just as important, ReInforced Care continues to be flexible,” Cronin said. “They continuously ask for our feedback on the call script to make sure they are as effective as possible. They genuinely want to represent us well.”

ReInforced Care meets with Cronin on a weekly basis to review call results and to see if any adjustments are needed to the script as well as to the data collection and transfer processes. “They are also always available throughout the week and have become more of a partner rather than a vendor,” Cronin said. “And the technology that categorizes and prioritizes patient responses works so smoothly, we rarely have issues.”

Because Milton Hospital now uncovers patient problems sooner through ReInforced Care, the hospital staff can intervene earlier before problems turn into bigger issues. The staff also knows within a day of discharge of any patient issues, which even if not health-related, are important for Cronin and the staff to know about. The immediate feedback has helped improve overall service levels, and over time, the number of complaints has been reduced as the hospital applies corrective actions.

Milton Hospital also relies on the PM360 database to proactively send general health messages via voice mails, such as reminders to monitor diets closely during holiday seasons. In addition, the hospital can capture new patient data it never had before, which facilitates the identification of process improvements and leads to greater accuracy of patient data. “This in

turn, helps make patients feel more comfortable about the health services we offer,” Cronin said.

To further enhance the PM360 solution for Milton Hospital, ReInforced Care has created a secure Web portal through which hospital staff can view the results of patient responses in real time. The staff will also be able to use the portal interface to manage call-backs and review the results of patient calls.

With PM360 helping Milton Hospital reduce readmission rates, the hospital can also track to see if it's on schedule to comply with the Affordable Care Act as 2013 approaches and compliance testing begins. “Partnering with ReInforced Care has helped us understand that the key to reducing preventable readmissions is leveraging the data and analytics that PM360 provides,” Cronin concluded. “The data helps us understand the reasons behind specific readmissions, and we can then effectively determine the appropriate metrics, track performance, and uncover root causes. Ultimately, this will lead to improving our services and reducing our readmission rates even further.”

1. Jencks, S. et al., New England Journal of Medicine, 360(14). 2009