

Clear & Effective Patient Discharge Instructions Pay Off for St. Joseph Health System – Sonoma County



An **Exit-Writer** White Paper



160 Wikiup Drive, Suite 205
Santa Rosa, CA 95403
800.598.7258
www.exit-writer.com

Contents

Executive Summary	1
Introduction	1
Previous Options	2
The Exit-Writer Solution	2
Implementation	3
Lessons Learned	4
The Bottom Line	4

Executive Summary

Exit-Writer software instructions are ideal for hospital EDs, urgent care clinics, and other general medical facilities such as family practices and clinics looking to provide clear and effective discharge instructions that simplify and expedite patient checkout and support successful follow up care and recovery.

Health Care Executives considering this sort of system and related medical information technology are looking for solutions that offer financial as well as clinical benefits. Building the financial case for most systems has typically been limited to prospective analyses of presumed operational improvements in the absence of historical data from current users.

This study shows retrospective financial results achieved by an Urgent Care practice serving two communities in Northern California following deployment of Exit-Writer, a leading platform for discharge instructions. These results demonstrate an almost-instantaneous payback after implementing the system.

Introduction

Clear and effective discharge instructions simplify and expedite patient checkout and support successful follow up care and recovery for St. Joseph Health System – Sonoma County (California).

The urgent care clinics management team was looking to provide clear and effective discharge instructions to simplify and expedite patient checkout

and support successful follow up care and recovery.

Investing in any electronic medical records or discharge instructions system can be a difficult decision. Physicians and administrators needed to analyze the impact of the investment on both the operational and financial aspects of the organization as well as its clinical impact for patients. Implementing any system has widespread effects on associations within the department and without. With so much involved, physicians and administrators needed to manage the risks associated with change by having as much pertinent facts at hand as they choose the path to follow. As well as projected financials, other motives driving deployment of new information systems include national concerns for patient safety, records management, and the never-ending quest for operational efficiency.

Previous Options

"Exit-Writer is fifty percent cheaper ... and significantly faster than our previous method (handwritten/preprinted instructions)."

Ed M. West, M.D., FACEP, directs urgent care physician services at St Joseph Health System clinics in Rohnert Park and Santa Rosa in Sonoma County, California.

Each clinic serves a portion of the county's population of nearly 500,000 people and together they see well over 50,000 patients per year.

The only options that used to be available in providing discharge information were using handwritten or preprinted materials.

The handwritten instructions were tailored to each patient by the attending physician, but weren't very thorough or consistent. Use of some pamphlets or preprinted instructions obtained from varied sources provided greater consistency, but could not cover the wide range of conditions presenting in an urgent care clinic. In addition, there were requirements to manage the inventory of materials including efforts ensuring that information in each document remained current with evolving protocols.

Needless to say, this was not an optimal situation for high-quality patient care and staff time management.

The Exit-Writer Solution

Some of the most compelling arguments for implementing the Exit-Writer electronic discharge instructions at St Joseph Health System were found in clinical and operational benefits that the mechanized system offered.

With such a system, physicians and their teams almost immediately gained better ways to:

- Eliminate the need to build or compile all their own content by providing standard clinical content

- Allow providers to adapt or build separate instructions to address conditions not covered by standard library content
- Expedite checkout with quickly customized instructions and prescription printing
- Limit liability exposure by the warning signs included in each instruction
- Speed record look-up by searching the electronic database for a record of information given to each patient
- Enhance compliance with simple instructions for home care
- Increase patient satisfaction by providing better explanation of their conditions, treatment and requirements for follow up care
- Increase staff satisfaction by reducing phone calls from patients, pharmacies and referral or primary care physicians
- Increase accuracy of information, including printed prescriptions
- Save money by decreasing the amount of stored, printed materials
- Stay HIPAA and JCAHO compliant with requirements for record-tracking and patient education
- Do it all fast with a comprehensive database of 1,300+ unique instructions written in plain, non-technical English and

Spanish (soon to be available in Chinese, Vietnamese and Russian); many with full-color illustrations

Implementation

Exit-Writer provides an overview of the patient's condition, advice for home care and how to prevent complications, signs and symptoms to be aware of, and guidance on when it is appropriate to seek further medical help. Aimed at the 6th -8th grade reading level many instructions include pictures to aid understanding. All are printed in an easy-to-read format and include:

- A description of the patient's medical condition(s), written in plain, non-technical language – all in English and Spanish with color illustrations included on many. Chinese, Vietnamese and Russian to be available soon.
- Treatment and care information including prescribed medication instructions.
- Instructions for follow-up, e.g., lab, x-ray, other tests, next office visit, specialist referrals.
- Personalized work and school releases, authorization and referral forms.
- Prescriptions are printed on secure printer paper with the patients name and care provider automatically entered, ready for the prescriber's signature. Complete medication instructions are also printed for the patient.
- Fill-in fields allow care givers to incorporate visit-specific information such as activity restrictions, follow-up appointments and return to work

information into instructions before they are printed.

Completed discharge instructions can be easily stored for future recall.

Lessons Learned

Electronic patient discharge instructions save St. Joseph's physicians' valuable time for the medical staff. The Exit-Writer system's ease of use makes it a cost-effective solution that eliminates the need to maintain stored, printed materials and helps the organization meet JCAHO requirements for patient and family education. The instructions empower patients with information specific to their conditions and care, and offer reminders of follow-up care and referrals.

As a result, these patients are ultimately more satisfied with their care, care givers, and health care facility. The clear information leads to greater patient understanding making them more apt to comply with care recommendations resulting in a faster healing time with fewer complications.

The clear instructions and prescriptions reduce patient and pharmacy call-backs

In addition, system reports allow physicians to review their efforts including providing information to indicate trends in diagnoses, treatments and prescribed drugs.

The Bottom Line

- Three (3) minutes were saved on each patient discharged by eliminating the need to find and collate printed materials or handwrite patient instructions.
- In a 25,000 average ED volume, you save 1,250 hours per year (based on those 3 minutes saved above).
 - Physician savings -
104 hrs/mo @ \$125/hr =
\$13,020 in 1st month.
 - RN savings -
104 hrs/mo @ \$50/hr =
\$5,208 in 1st month.

"Exit-Writer paid for itself in less than one month!"

- One-year Exit-Writer costs, including computers, are easily paid back in savings during the first month's use.

