

Scribe program allows for more direct provider-patient care

UMASS MEMORIAL HEALTH CARE

UMass Memorial Health Care is the largest healthcare system in Central MA with three hospitals and over 1,000 beds. The emergency department (ED) at UMass Memorial has two campuses, University and Memorial, as well as a separate pediatric emergency department, and treats approximately 135,000 patients annually.

Challenge

Documentation can take up a large amount of a physician's time and mental energy that could better be devoted to patient care. While admittedly an upfront investment of resources, scribes have been shown to save on costs related to physician documentation time while also increasing throughput and improving overall provider and patient satisfaction.¹²

Action

In 2013, UMass Memorial implemented the use of medical scribes in the ED and was successful in making the case to hospital leadership that scribes would boost physician efficiency and documentation while also improving job satisfaction. Scribes in the UMass ED accompany the supervising provider to a patient's room and document the history and physical exam as well as medical decision making and interpretations of studies. This takes the onus of documentation off of the physician, who can devote more time to direct patient care. While some institutions have homegrown scribe programs, UMass found it more convenient and beneficial to contract with ScribeAmerica, a company that recruits and trains individuals to be scribes.

Outcomes

Since its implementation, the ED has found very few downsides to the scribe program other than perhaps high turnover in scribes, likely due to the nature of the position as a bridge to further healthcare related education. UMass ED physicians overwhelmingly find the scribes helpful. As Vice Chair of Emergency Medicine, Dr. Martin Reznick, puts it, "the vast majority [of physicians] find [scribes] very valuable and rewarding in that it allows them to do 'doc stuff' as opposed to documentation." An unexpected side benefit has been the teaching relationship between physicians and scribes. Many of the scribes aspire to be a nurse, physician's assistant, medic or physician and enjoy learning in the field. Physicians enjoy the opportunity to teach. Most importantly, the use of scribes has reduced the amount of work physicians are doing during or after their shifts and allows them to spend more time at the bedside. This "high touch care" helps build a relationship between physician and patient and improves patient satisfaction.

What are medical scribes?

Medical scribes are non-clinical members of a care team who accompany clinicians during patient visits to document patient-clinician interactions and medical decision-making. In so doing, they enable clinicians to spend more time at the bedside.

¹ Heaton HA, Nestler DM, Barry WJ, et al. A time-driven activity-based costing analysis of emergency department scribes. *Mayo Clin Proc Innov Qual Outcomes*. 2019 Feb 26; 3(1): 30-34.

² Shuaib W, Hilmi J, Caballero J, et al. Impact of a scribe program on patient throughput, physician productivity, and patient satisfaction in a community-based emergency department. *Health Informatics J*. 2017 Mar 1.