

Managing Regulations Online: Saving Staff Time Means More Time for Patient Care

BY MARGARET BARRY

Rachael Merritt, director of health care improvement at The Medical Center of Plano, spends her days keeping the hospital out of regulatory hot water. Staying on top of the many regulations that govern hospitals is one of the most challenging aspects of her job. Considering the heavy non-compliance fines, it also is one of the most essential.

Thankfully, Merritt can turn to VSurvey to make her job easier. The Web-based software program keeps the hospital in compliance, saves money, allows staff to spend more time on patient care and improves employee satisfaction.

The software, made by Verge Solutions, is designed to help hospitals keep abreast of complex federal and state hospital regulations, accreditation requirements and many other important procedures and statistics, including hand hygiene compliance, medication management and patient turnaround times. With VSurvey, the tallying of regulatory compliance surveys and generation of reports is automated – all Merritt has to do is input the data, and VSurvey does the rest.

Before VSurvey was instituted, it took, on average, two hours for Merritt and her staff to consult a huge manual that catalogs in detail all the standards governing hospitals, enter the data, tally up the numbers, summon spreadsheets and format a report. Now, she says, that process takes 20 minutes, and this alone has improved employee satisfaction.

There are as many as 20 separate audits for hand hygiene alone. “Can you imagine how much time it takes to gather and input the data for 20 surveys, then tally the results by hand?” Merritt asked.

VSurvey has saved countless hours of staff time. The return on the hospital’s investment in VSurvey is considerable – nearly \$145,000 in only 14 months. The software’s streamlined system for compliance-related analysis and reports alone saved \$77,235, or nearly half of the overall cost savings since the software was introduced. The price of the software is \$11,465.

One big time-saver is VSurvey’s ability to cross-reference compliance standards from state and federal regulatory agencies, as well as from a number of government organizations that oversee rehabilitation and breast health procedures. A simple keyword search reveals the regulations from all agencies regarding that particular search term.

“This not only helps the staff catch requirements that they might otherwise miss, but also it enables them to build safety procedures from the ground up,” Merritt said.



Another key benefit of using VSurvey is that frontline employees have immediate access to the regulations. When regulations were on paper and only the director had access to the documents, it was more difficult to disseminate the information to employees.

“Now that frontline staff members have access to the same information,” Merritt said, “they have begun to ask how the standards relate to their areas. With a better understanding of standards across departments, we’ve seen performance improve.”

Verge Solutions offers a number of software programs (together known as VSuite) that help hospital administrators with a host of issues besides regulatory compliance, including patient safety issues, patient relations, claims management, medical staff management, committee workflow, root-cause analysis and peer review. More than 600 hospital clients use at least one VSuite program, according to Barbara Norman, senior vice president of Verge Solutions.

For example, VCredentialing, which automates and integrates the credentialing process for doctors, is increasingly popular. With this program, administrators can swiftly confirm that doctors have kept their licenses up-to-date. Without software to streamline this process, credentialing can be a time-consuming process for hospitals. Another VSuite program, VCommittEase, helps hospitals streamline committee meeting workflow by housing presentations, spreadsheets and other documents on a single website, providing easy access for committee members. The software also can be programmed to assign tasks to committee members and send reminders until projects are completed.

“More important than saving trees or money, VSurvey has saved us an estimated 4,550 man-hours. This means more time can be spent on patient care,” Merritt said.

For more information about Verge Solutions, contact Barbara Norman at barbara@verge-solutions.com or 408/227-1314 or go to www.verge-solutions.com. ★