

Steps to Improve Your Organization's Knowledge Management



Knowledge management helps health care organizations of all types and sizes more effectively manage internally and externally generated knowledge, enhance care and customer/patient service.

As a knowledge-driven industry, health care relies on steady access to information to enable accurate decision-making and drive rapid problem-solving. Yet health care professionals are often overwhelmed with the volume of new information and are challenged to incorporate it into their daily work, if it has not been explicitly curated.

Accordingly, the need for knowledge management in health care is greater than ever, especially amid exponentially increasing amounts of data, regulations, and clinical and non-clinical information that health care professionals must consume. For nearly three decades, knowledge management, the process of creating, managing, sharing and using information to drive organizational objectives, has been recognized as a distinct part of business strategy in health care.

How and where does your organization stand with its knowledge management program? Have you assessed the current state of knowledge management in your organization and determined your goals for a future state program? The following steps will help you determine the best path forward for improving your existing or implementing a new knowledge management program.

Define Your Knowledge Management Strategy

Re-positioning knowledge management as a key driver of organizational success is the first step in developing a comprehensive program. Although knowledge management has existed for many years, it is often considered peripheral to the “real” duties of health care. This is unfortunate, as an effective knowledge management program can support faster on-boarding of new staff and more efficient training in new processes and procedures, streamline communication and make it more transparent, and reduce re-work and the duplication of efforts.

Next, identify a respected and committed leadership team to champion your knowledge management strategy. Such support underscores your cultural commitment to knowledge management and will trickle down into the operational priorities of others within your organization.

Once you’ve established knowledge management as a key priority within your organization, you can next determine the best approach to implement it. Though the approach will vary from one organization to the next, the pillars of a comprehensive program generally include:

- Developing a culture of active knowledge-sharing and information
- Optimizing access to key information
- Enhancing information-leveraging to improve client services
- Supporting problem resolution by sharing experiences and learnings
- Minimizing the loss of knowledge and improving knowledge transfer
- Contributing to more efficient work processes that reduce the amount of errors and re-work

If your organization is already pursuing some or most of these activities, congratulations, you’re ahead of the curve! If your organization is in its infancy or is new to knowledge management, rather than trying to tackle many or all of these pillars at once, consider tackling one or two at a time, and as part of this effort, achieving a “quick win” to gain additional internal support in the future.

A “quick win” can be defined as a rapid effort to support your organization’s overall knowledge management goals while promoting ongoing engagement with stakeholders. For example, you can achieve a quick win by having all of your departments add the following four questions at the end of all staff meetings. The goal of this tactic is to begin building a culture of knowledge-sharing:

1. What information needs to be shared?
2. Who should share this information?
3. With whom should this information be shared?
4. By when will the information be shared?

Seek Results to Showcase Knowledge Management Success

As you implement your knowledge management strategy and it becomes part of the everyday vernacular of your organization and is wedded into everyday practices, you can develop a set of key performance indicators (KPIs) to measure the success of your program. Consider the following measurement domains when developing your knowledge management KPIs:

- Alignment of the knowledge management strategy to your organization's strategic goals
- Demonstrated enablement of knowledge management champions to share and "socialize" the strategy with all key stakeholders to obtain buy-in and support
- Ongoing identification of future-state drivers within each pillar of your knowledge management strategy to support long-term program development
- Development of actionable tools to support knowledge management implementation and ongoing program improvement

As you begin to experience success with your knowledge management program, be mindful that you have adequate resources to support your efforts. This may include developing new positions to support ongoing knowledge management, both in leadership and non-leadership roles, as well as implementing new infrastructure and technological resources. While this represents an up-front investment, the return on investment and value for knowledge management infrastructure is well worth the effort.

Starting and sustaining a successful knowledge management program can deliver significant long-term benefits. Knowledge management helps health care organizations of all types and sizes more effectively manage internally and externally generated knowledge, enhance care and customer/patient service, spur innovation and achieve greater operational excellence.