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Frederik Brabant, vice-president international healthcare operations at Nuance, discusses why accuracy is paramount to saving time, money and delivering a better patient experience.

IMPROVING THE ACCURACY OF PATIENT RECORDS

The NHS is arguably facing one of its toughest times since its inception. Today, it faces unprecedented challenges from a rising population, increasing pressure to reform and growing patient demands.

Couple these hurdles with a backdrop of budget cuts and austerity, the government commitment to develop a paperless organisation by 2020 and the fact that two-thirds (64%) of hospitals are still reliant on paper to file patient and internal reports – and it's clear to see why doctors and healthcare professionals are feeling the squeeze.

Commitments have been made to try and ease this process, with 64% of NHS IT leaders currently engaging in the procurement or roll-out of electronic health records (EHRs), with the aim of providing higher quality patient documentation.

However, despite this investment, healthcare professionals are struggling to adopt these new processes. This is often due to complex user interfaces that can be difficult to navigate at the point of care, leading to a lack of completeness and accuracy in patient data. In response, speech recognition technology is fast becoming one of the most used tools in the quest for clinical documentation improvement.

Building the patient narrative

Recent research has found that 68% of the patient record is actually 'narrative', and this context is critical to telling the wider story beyond simply the symptoms felt or medication taken. However, building this narrative takes time and patience. In

fact, healthcare professionals now spend more than 50% of their working day creating, reviewing and updating clinical documentation – time that could be better spent with patients.

By harnessing technology, such as speech-enabled clinical documentation, doctors capture a more complete version of the patient story – including the wider context about their lives as people. This is especially beneficial for patients requiring multiple treatment protocols across multi-disciplinary teams.

Not only does speech-enabled clinical documentation free up healthcare professionals' time and their ability to focus on care, it can improve quality of care. By hearing what is being said and entered into the notes during a consultation, patients become more engaged in their care. More time, better communication, empathy and involvement in the process of their own care will improve concordance with medical treatment and is likely to improve the overall patient journey.

Driving up efficiency and plugging the gaps

While research has found that healthcare professionals spend up to half their day creating and updating clinical documentation, the same research found they also spend up to 52 minutes per day searching for information that they cannot find in clinical records.

The cost of this lost time is equivalent to more than three outpatient clinics per doctor per week, or up to £20,000 in time value of a senior doctor's salary wasted per year in this activity.

A trial by Düsseldorf University Clinic found speech recognition actually increased documentation speed by 26%, boosting the amount of content by 82%, and also resulted in enhanced user satisfaction.

Speech-enabled clinical documentation can also help resolve the potentially costly issue of 'missing information' inefficiencies, such as the duplication of diagnostic tests – typically caused by communication gaps and rearranged appointments resulting from a lack of information. As a patient, nothing is more frustrating than feeling like they've wasted time on a previous consultation due to lost or even overlooked information, so it is critical that trusts maintain and build patient health records with pinpoint accuracy and as much context as possible.

Filing patient records is no longer simply restricted to logging their prescriptions, medication or recent symptoms. Today, patients require a personalised service every time they visit their clinician, with insights gleaned from previous visits and the information they have previously lodged about their lifestyle and habits.

With healthcare professionals facing extraordinary challenges, technology – such as speech-enabled documentation – could be the key to giving them more access to patients, longer and more detailed consultations and an improved service across the board.

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