



# Issue Brief

TRIPLE AIM ACHIEVEMENT ISSUE BRIEF • APRIL 2015

The Strategic Quality Initiatives division of the Missouri Hospital Association will periodically release tips and tools to assist hospitals in achieving the Triple Aim – better health, better care, lower costs. These resources, and many more, can be accessed online at [www.mhanet.com/strategic-quality](http://www.mhanet.com/strategic-quality)

## Bedside Whiteboard Communication: Power in Simplicity

Engaging patients and families in improving health care outcomes means creating effective communication between those who provide care and those who receive it. Patients, families and their advocates increasingly understand the importance of patient-centered communication. Easy-to-understand tools and checklists that enhance communication and improve patient and family involvement and understanding in care are essential.

At a time when technology has taken center stage, a tool as simple as a whiteboard can be easily overlooked or underrated. Yet, there's power in that simplicity. It requires little training to use and can be viewed by patients at their convenience. When everyone understands and agrees on how it should be used and by whom, it can quickly close communication gaps between providers and their patients and families.

Chances are that every bed in your hospital has a whiteboard nearby. According to one hospitalist researcher, physicians and nurses aren't realizing the full potential of whiteboards to improve communications with patients. At the University of California, San Francisco, hospitalist Niraj L. Sehgal, M.D., MPH, surveyed his nursing and

hospitalist colleagues to identify the barriers preventing more effective whiteboard use. He realized that fixing the No. 1 complaint — the fact that dry-erase pens disappear — was simple, but figuring out how to solve other problems wasn't. For instance, providers didn't know what to write when there was no template guiding them. There was confusion about who should keep whiteboard information up-to-date, and even concerns about patient privacy.

Survey [results](#) confirmed a fundamental lack of understanding about the kind of communication for which the whiteboards should be used. The most compelling argument in favor of the conscientious use of bedside whiteboards is the potential to enhance patients' involvement in their own care. Whiteboards should focus on what patients want to know and need to know, and less about what physicians and nurses want to communicate with each other. Whiteboards should allow patients and families to easily record a question, a reminder, or the family's location. Staff should introduce patients and families to the whiteboard upon arrival to the room and invite them to use it.

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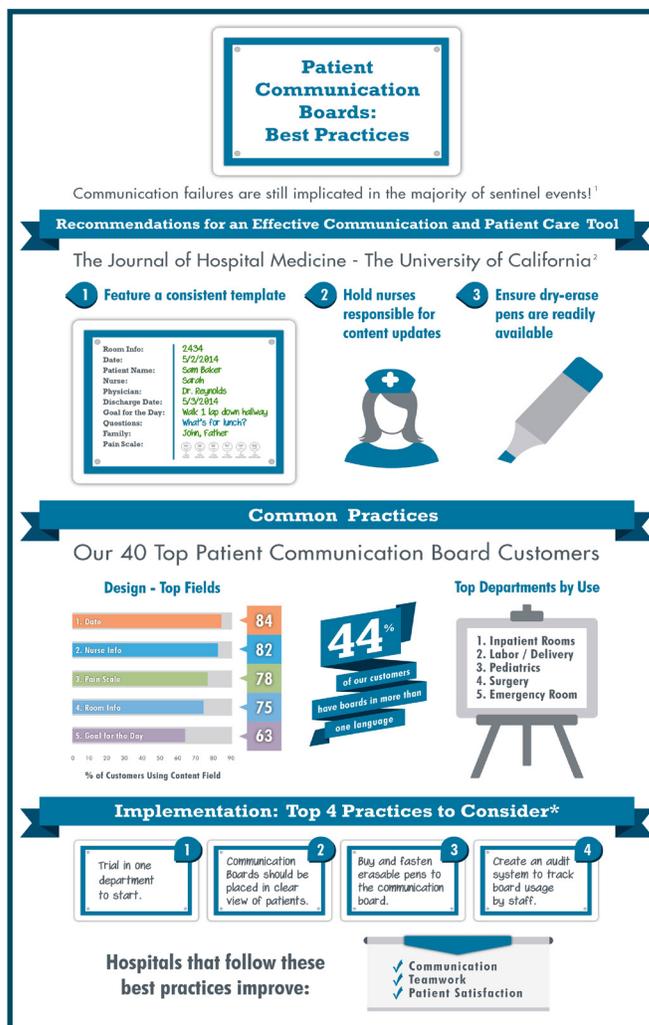
“We need to balance the desire to include everything versus information that is really high yield.”

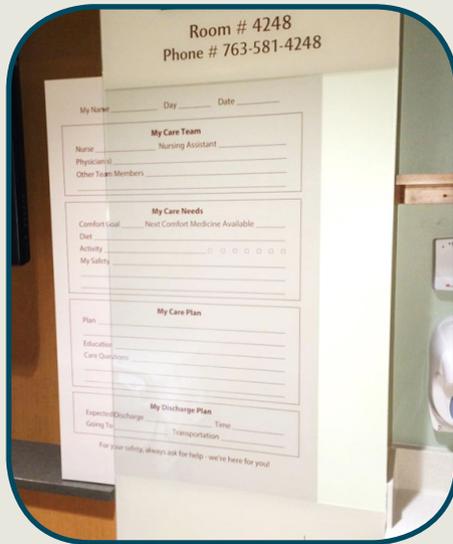
— Niraj L. Sehgal, M.D., MPH  
University of California, San Francisco

The April 2010 edition of the *Journal of Hospital Medicine* provided the following tips to help health care providers make better use of bedside whiteboards.

- Location and size matter. Place whiteboards where patients can easily see them from their beds and write big.
- Fasten pens to the whiteboards. Keep extra pens in nursing stations and have dedicated staff (nurses, aides or housekeeping staff) quickly replace them as needed.
- Create templates. Include the full date, patient name (or initials), name of bedside nurse, name of primary physicians, goal of the day (as stated by patients), anticipated discharge date, family members’ contact information, and space for families to write down questions as they arise.
- Give bedside nurses the responsibility for writing and updating information.
- Use auditors to survey whiteboard use, identify barriers and provide feedback.
- Ensure that whiteboard information is being used with informed patient consent.

By customizing whiteboards for various service lines — inpatient rooms, labor and delivery, pediatrics, surgery and emergency, etc. — hospitals have the opportunity to engage patients in meaningful ways, specific to their condition. Below is a snapshot of the [visual summary](#) of best practices UCSF identified for using the patient whiteboard effectively along with data from John Reumann, showing how 40 top health care providers are using whiteboards to improve patient communications.





## INNOVATION IN COMMUNICATION

At Kaiser Permanente Roseville Hospital, in Sacramento, Calif., the health care team bought a digital camera and took pictures of everyone — physicians, nurses, aides, respiratory therapists — on the unit. They attached the photos to the whiteboards, with names and titles underneath, allowing patients and families to connect faces with names.

When Maple Grove Hospital in Minnesota first opened, standard, templated whiteboards were installed

in each room. Soon after, leadership realized that the boards would not allow the design to grow and flex with needs of different patient groups and care teams; therefore, they replaced them with recessed, glass-fronted boards that allow easy removal and replacement of paper templates that slide behind the glass.

## RESOURCES

Safety is Personal: Partnering with Patients and Families for the Safest Care

[http://c.ymcdn.com/sites/www.npsf.org/resource/resmgr/LLI/Safety\\_Is\\_Personal.pdf](http://c.ymcdn.com/sites/www.npsf.org/resource/resmgr/LLI/Safety_Is_Personal.pdf)

IHI Improvement Stories: Transforming Care at the Bedside: Sparking Innovation and Excitement on the Hospital Unit

<http://www.ihl.org/resources/Pages/ImprovementStories/TransformingCareattheBedsideinitiativePrototypephase.aspx>

Closing Communication Gaps, Engaging Patients in Meaningful Ways

<http://www.engagingpatients.org/patient-centered-communication/low-tech-high-touch-strategy-engaging-patients-meaningful-ways/>

Maple Grove Hospital: Designing Whiteboards for Flexibility

<http://experiahealthblog.com/2014/02/18/plan-of-care-whiteboards-post-3-designing-for-flexibility-at-maple-grove-hospital/>



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