

Optimizing Load-Leveling and Streamlining Patient Transfers

A case study on Mercy Health — Toledo's Top Gun initiative



Challenge:

Mercy Health — Toledo is a health system comprising seven hospitals within the Toledo, Ohio service area, including three rural hospitals. The leadership at Mercy Health — Toledo identified an opportunity to enhance transfer times and reduce network leakage for medically stable patients requiring a higher level of care from one of their rural hospitals. Often, these transfer requests were directed to Mercy Health — St. Vincent's Medical Center, a Level 1 trauma center.

However, Mercy Health — St. Vincent's Medical Center faced challenges with overcrowding, affecting their ability to provide timely transfer services to rural and other community facilities. Additionally, there was an operational load imbalance among other acute hospitals within the system that also provided high levels of specialty care.

To address these challenges, Mercy Health — Toledo collaborated with Conduit Health Partners, their strategic partner in patient transfer services, to develop an expedited process for transferring medically stable emergency department patients who required higher levels of care than what their rural hospitals could offer.

Objectives:

Mercy Health — Toledo established the following objectives:

- Decrease the total patient transfer time for targeted patients of rural hospitals to acute hospitals within system
- Optimize the health system's inpatient capacity by transferring patients to network hospitals with more capacity, known as "load-leveling"
- Reduce the burden on staff by decreasing the number of communications required to transfer a patient

Implementation:

The Top Gun initiative was designed to simplify and expedite the transfer process of medical stable patients who are in need of a higher level of care while optimizing resource allocation within Mercy Health — Toledo's network.

Key elements of the initiative include:

Single point of contact: Referring facilities are provided with a single point of contact at Conduit Health Partners to manage the transfer process. The referring facility appreciated that they had a partner who can take care of the logistics and reduce the administrative burden on staff, allowing them to focus on patient care.

Expedited transfer process: With visibility to the network and transfer agreements in place, there is no need for a ready bed. Conduit is able to immediately engage with the transport vendors and accepting facility to get the patient moved quickly and safely.

Robust resource repository: Conduit Health Partners leverages the robust resource repository to ensure the Conduit team quickly understands available services and capabilities across the Mercy Health — Toledo network for each patient. These materials which include customized service line protocols, geographical consideration, facility administrator escalations, on-call schedules and more are developed in conjunction with the transfer center client during the onsite deep discovery process and help Conduit team members to serve as an extension of the health systems team.

Regional capacity dashboard: Conduit utilizes a real time capacity dashboard to understand bed availability across the Mercy Health — Toledo market. This system allows Conduit Health Partners to load level patients across the health system and minimize delays in patient care.

Real-time communication: Through efficient communication channels, Conduit Health Partners provided real-time updates to referring facilities and Mercy Health — Toledo regarding the status of patient transfers. Clinicians are informed when their patient is accepted and given an ETA for the transfer.



Two processes were critical for the success of the initiative:

1. Collaboration and commitment to load leveling:

Conduit leverages tools and processes to guide the Conduit nurse to make the right decision in where to transfer the patient. One such tool is Epic's capacity dashboard which enables the Conduit team to have real-time visibility to the available beds within the system. The visibility of this data along with information on the services for each facility enables Conduit to make strategic decisions with the referring location's clinicians to transfer the patient to the right hospital in the most efficient manner possible.

2. Immediate engagement with transport vendors:

Immediately following the transfer request, Conduit begins the process with the transport vendors. The Top Gun initiative provided assurance to the transport vendors that their inpatient transfer could be safely handed-off in the emergency department, if an inpatient bed was not ready. This resulted in saving valuable time in the transfer process.

Results:

The implementation of the Top Gun initiative yielded significant improvements in patient direct admission transfer efficiency and communication.

Results included:

Reduced patient transfer time: By streamlining the transfer process, the total patient transfer time decreased by an average of 34%.

Increased direct admissions: Through an expedited admission process, the metro hospitals in the Mercy Health — Toledo experienced a 54% increase in direct admissions per week.

Streamlined communications: The communication burden on staff was improved through a 12% decrease in the total number of communications required to transfer a patient.

The Top Gun initiative exemplifies the successful collaboration between Conduit Health Partners and Mercy Health — Toledo in addressing the challenges associated with patient transfers. By implementing streamlined processes and leveraging innovative solutions, the initiative achieved its objectives of expediting transfers and improving patient outcomes. Due to its success, Conduit has also applied these best practices in load leveling and transferring patients quicker to other clients.

1 [Number of calls clinicians make to facilitate a transfer]

34% [Decrease in total patient transfer time]

54% [Increase in direct admissions per week for metro hospitals in network]

“ I feel a need for speed with these transfers. Utilizing lean methodologies, we were able to develop processes thanks in part to the collaboration and data from Conduit to ensure we were meeting the needs of our internal customers and most importantly, helping our patients get the care they need as quickly as possible. ”

— Chris Freeman, BSN, RN, Manager, Central Staffing and Scheduling, Mercy Health — Toledo