

# REDUCING VARIABILITY IN HEALTHCARE:

## Key lessons from the Australian healthcare sector

Insights from



**Wolters Kluwer**

When you have to be right

**V**ariation – in clinical workflow, processes and patient care – has been a key focus for the Australian healthcare sector for some time now. Reducing variability in healthcare can have big benefits when it comes to improving efficiency in time, cost, labour and quality of care.

But despite the widespread recognition of these benefits, reducing variability in a clinical setting still remains a challenge.

While the sector now has the knowledge, technology and sense of urgency to drive a standardisation of care, healthcare organisations are still grappling with how to make required changes systemically across teams and care settings to change deeply-rooted behaviours amongst staff and patients alike.

The theme of variability in healthcare was a core area of focus at the Australian Healthcare Week Executive Roundtable Discussion in **March 2018**.

Hosted by Wolters Kluwer, the discussion was led by 12 key representatives from across the Australian Healthcare sector such as Alfred Health, Healthscope, Princess Alexandra Hospital, Queensland Health, Metro North Hospital and Health Service and Calvary care; and explored the major challenges associated with providing a consistent approach to healthcare delivery and the opportunities to improve this in the coming years.

This article outlines the key findings from their discussion, exploring the five major factors healthcare organisations can consider to reduce healthcare variability and ensure better patient care, service delivery and clinical efficiency.



## 1 IMPROVE CLINICAL DECISION MAKING

During the roundtable discussion, clinical variation emerged as a key challenge for healthcare professionals, particularly in a public setting where junior doctors rotate every six months.

Wolters Kluwer's UpToDate software was highlighted as a great tool for supporting junior doctor decision making to ensure patients are getting the quality care they need.

Similarly, many organisations are also focusing on how to improve support for clinical decision making and linking this to the patient journey.

*"In one previous role I was in, we almost had 100 per cent variation in decision making all of the time. Even when patterns of flow started to emerge, they began to break down at every single level."*

In response to the disparities in clinical decision making, organisations have begun to systematise different parts of the patient journey to pinpoint where the disconnection is occurring. While it is a continuing journey for many, the key to success so far has been a focus on defining and communicating key roles for staff.

## 2 MANAGING THE TRANSITION TO EMR

While Electronic Medical Records (EMR) are set to bring about big efficiency gains and cost savings for the Australian healthcare sector, the changes associated with the adoption of the new technology is also bringing about a number of challenges.

Resistance to change, up-skilling staff and siloed organisational structures were highlighted in the roundtable discussion as the major barriers to EMR implementation.

*"The adoption of EMR is the biggest challenge to reducing healthcare variability. The political agenda is always a challenge and there seems to be an expectation that healthcare providers must operate as they did previously - no matter what changes are thrust upon them."*

*"There is no sense that you can actually stop, take a breath and learn about a new system. Instead, the expectation is to start implementing the new system and associated technology, effective immediately."*

For many organisations - in both rural and metropolitan settings - the biggest variation when it comes to EMR is employee skill set. As a result, up-skilling and educating clinical staff about the value EMR can provide to patients and the broader organisation has become a core focus.

### ABOUT



**Wolters Kluwer**

When you have to be right

Wolters Kluwer's Clinical Effectiveness solutions help healthcare professionals measurably improve the quality and effectiveness of care. Wolters Kluwer provide evidence-based clinical content and advanced decision support technology wherever healthcare professionals are working so they can make the best possible decisions for their patients.

Their trusted point-of-care solutions improve clinical effectiveness by providing consistent and harmonized content that standardizes the quality care, enhances the patient experience and reduces costs.

### MAKING THE RIGHT POINT-OF-CARE DECISIONS

UpToDate® is an evidence-based, physician-authored clinical decision support resource which clinicians trust to make the right point-of-care decisions. More than 6,300 world-renowned physician authors, editors, and peer reviewers synthesize the most recent medical information into trusted, evidence-based recommendations that are proven to improve patient care, quality, and outcomes.

### STRENGTHENING MEDICATION DECISION-MAKING

The Clinical Drug Information product lines of Lexicomp®, Medi-Span®, and Facts & Comparisons® offer a complete medication decision support solution serving an array of healthcare markets. Together, they deliver timely, relevant, and rigorously reviewed drug and clinical information that is easily accessible in an advanced technology platform.

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### 3 MEASURING OUTCOMES TO DRIVE EFFICIENCY

During the roundtable discussion, there was a general consensus that many organisations are not putting enough resources and focus into patient centered outcomes. According to one representative, achieving outcomes begins and ends with measurement:

*“You can’t go to a health organisation and ask: what proportion of your patients stopped smoking because of your intervention? Or what proportions of patients have controlled hypertension as opposed to uncontrolled? Anyone who works in research understands that it is the outcomes that matter because they are most important to the patient. But these outcomes have to be balanced against what is important to the health system and public health.”*

Implementing an effective knowledge management system was highlighted as a key tool to ensure outcomes are set, documented and visible to all clinical teams.

*“When an employee learns something new about a patient, it is important they write it down or enter it somewhere digitally to make it available to the people that need to know it. While organisations are certainly getting to the heart of this, many clinical staff members move frequently from team to team and they have trouble picking up what they are supposed to do if the information is not there.”*

### 4 CREATING TRANSPARENCY

With rise of EMR playing a big role in healthcare variability, many at the roundtable discussion agreed that transparency of data and information is essential.

The biggest pain-point stopping organisations’ from achieving data transparency is resistance to change from internal staff. Coined ‘data collectors’ (the name given to staff or departments who collect data and keep it private) many of the participants could relate to the challenge of trying to communicate the value and importance of transparency.

*“Everybody collects their own data and then they keep it, so nobody else can see it. At the same time, there is also ‘data denying’ taking place. This is when people claim the data is so terrible, they can’t possibly make a decision based on it.”*

The most favorable way of overcoming this challenge is to introduce tools and training to ensure clinicians are on-board with the journey and that the benefits are clearly communicated.

*“You can’t start the journey until you allow people to do intelligent non-compliance. This is how you get clinicians on the journey and then you take the next steps every slowly. Once you have a few people on-side you can get into analytics, which leads to a discussion and then agreement on decision support and support tools. The end goal is standardisation, but it starts with transparency around decision making.”*

#### ABOUT



The 8th Annual Victorian Healthcare Week taking place **20-21 August 2018** at the Pullman, Albert Park in Melbourne will showcase the best solution providers under one roof to help decision makers understand which capabilities will help them achieve their goal of ensuring that Victorians, wherever they live, receive first-class care.

As an off-shoot of Australian Healthcare Week, Victorian Healthcare week will provide the opportunity to connect and gain recognition among key decision makers from across Victoria.

[FIND OUT MORE HERE](#)

#### ABOUT



Australian Healthcare Week is the One-Stop-Shop for Australasia’s healthcare community.

Taking place **27-28 March 2019** at the ICC in Sydney, the 9th Annual Australian Healthcare Week has been designed to bring together the entire healthcare community, from clinicians and nurses through to those responsible for technology and infrastructure, to address the challenge of improving patient outcomes while also increasing the efficiency of service delivery.

[FIND OUT MORE HERE](#)

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