5 steps physicians can take to get rid of “stupid stuff”

JAN 11, 2021

Sara Berg
Senior News Writer

Needless tasks have placed a heavy burden on doctors’ daily workload, which can lead to physician burnout. One area that has created significantly more work for physicians has been the electronic health record. But it’s time to reduce those administrative burdens by “getting rid of stupid stuff.”

Physicians are in the best position to recognize the “stupid stuff” in their daily tasks but may not feel that speaking up will accomplish much. A program in which suggestions for change can be effectively carried out is key to eliminating administrative burdens that can lead to physician burnout.

For example, Hawaii Pacific Health—a nonprofit health system in Honolulu—launched a program called “Getting Rid of Stupid Stuff.” In just a year, the system’s physicians and other clinicians have nominated more than 300 time-wasting EHR activities for the chopping block.

Doctors can learn how to identify problems, create a standardized organizational process to eliminate the “stupid stuff” in their day-to-day routines through an AMA STEPS Forward™ module. This free online module provides a list of key steps to get rid of stupid stuff and reduce administrative burdens.

Appoint a high-level champion to lead
Choose someone who has the power to make eliminating the stupid stuff a serious organizational initiative. This might be a good fit for the chief medical information officer. It is also key to have the chief experience officer or chief operating officer on board.

And don’t forget to include a practicing physician who uses the EHR. Including physicians in this initiative will help show leaders the seriousness of reducing the burdens. As the project expands, many champions may begin to view their work with more passion and vigor.
Engage appropriate departments
It is also important to include other departments to support the initiative. This will ensure the program is set up for success, especially if other departments can significantly improve their processes and work toward a common goal.

Other departments should be included at the beginning of the planning stages to prevent barriers or the delay of a solution. For example, the information technology department can help design, build, maintain or improve the EHR.

Gather information from physicians
To get rid of the poorly designed, unnecessary or burdensome work, you will first need to identify where this work lies. Some ways to do this is by advertising on the intranet page, in internal newsletters or during department meetings.

Ask physicians and other health professionals to think about their daily documentation and other tasks. What tasks do they feel fall into the “stupid stuff” category? Using a catchy title, such as “Getting Rid of Stupid Stuff” can help garner attention and promote change.

Triage suggestions for next steps
As physicians and other health professionals submit suggestions, acknowledge receipt and subsequent triage. If a request is minor, it can be fixed immediately. However, suggestions that require further investigation should be sent to a work group that includes physicians who can properly evaluate the request.

When a request is valuable, assign to specific individuals to complete. If rules and regulations cannot be changed, some suggestions will not get fixed. Send a response to acknowledge awareness of the situation. And if something already exists, respond with details on how to do what was asked.

Celebrate successes
All changes that are successfully enacted should be announced and celebrated—even the small ones. Physicians are often more willing to spend the time pointing out
inefficiencies if they see proof that change is possible. Smaller changes can be included in updates from IT while larger ones can be highlighted by office managers and other leaders for future investigation.

Committed to making physician burnout a thing of the past, the AMA has studied, and is currently addressing issues causing and fueling physician burnout—including time constraints, technology and regulations—to better understand and reduce the challenges physicians face. By focusing on factors causing burnout at the system-level, the AMA assesses an organization’s well-being and offers guidance and targeted solutions to support physician well-being and satisfaction.

AMA’s STEPS Forward™ open-access modules offer innovative strategies that allow physicians and their staff to thrive in the new health care environment. These courses can help you prevent physician burnout, create the organizational foundation for joy in medicine and improve practice efficiency.

The CME module, “Getting Rid of Stupid Stuff,” is enduring material and designated by the AMA for a maximum of 0.5 AMA PRA Category 1 Credit.

This module is part of the AMA Ed Hub, an online platform with high-quality CME and education that supports the professional development needs of physicians and other health professionals. With topics relevant to you, it also offers an easy, streamlined way to find, take, track and report educational activities.

Learn more about AMA CME accreditation.