How to celebrate progress on cutting doctors’ clerical burdens

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Unnecessary tasks have placed a heavy administrative burden on the daily workload of physicians and other health professionals, which can contribute to burnout. To overcome those burdensome tasks, physicians should target the “stupid stuff” they encounter daily.

This requires following five key steps outlined in the AMA STEPS Forward™ module, “Getting Rid of Stupid Stuff: Reduce the Unnecessary Daily Burdens for Clinicians.” The fifth, and final, step in the module focuses on celebrating the success of making changes to the daily workflow.

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 health professionals have nominated more than 300 time-wasting EHR activities for the chopping block.

“Any organization that’s willing to look at themselves critically earns a little bit more credibility with their staff,” said Melinda Ashton, MD, executive vice president and chief quality officer at Hawaii Pacific Health, who spearheaded this initiative to reduce administrative burden and work overload. “It’s the leadership saying, ‘We don’t know everything that you do and everything that you go through, but we want to make it better.’”

Expanding on the idea of eliminating stupid stuff, Dr. Ashton shares how to celebrate success throughout their own program.

Include the small wins too

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All changes—even the small ones—that are made to eliminate stupid stuff should be announced and celebrated within a health system or physician practice. Physicians and other health professionals are more willing to spend the time identifying sources of inefficiency if they see proof that change matters and is possible.

For those smaller changes, include in regular IT updates sent to the health system. If the change is larger, highlight these in more public venues such as leadership meetings or organizational bulletins. Communication about successes will help generate further interest while increasing confidence in the program.

**Announce in daily meetings**

“We've gone from only focused on the EHR, which was the original intent,” said Dr. Ashton. “It pretty quickly went away because we found we had to do the stuff that wasn't EHR related—we’ve moved to more facility based operational kinds of things.”

“Each of our facilities has daily huddles and the successes are commonly reported there,” she said, adding that there is “a lot of fun and excitement about that.”

**Highlight at yearly leadership meetings**

Health systems and organizations can also celebrate successes at annual leadership meetings. This allows leadership to not only celebrate wins together, but report back to their teams with the good news.

“We have an annual leadership meeting where, for the last two years, we have talked a good bit about stupid stuff and had fun with some of the things we found that people were identifying,” said Dr. Ashton. “It has been made very clear that this is a good thing to find something that is sort of embarrassingly bad.”

“It’s just part of the way we talk to each other. We think about whether new requests that recently have come in to do something might be considered stupid,” she said. “We're careful and people are willing to have ideas vetted that way.

“We’ve even budgeted for some of the cash improvements that come as a result of reducing some of this double and triple work,” added Dr. Ashton.
Send out newsletters

Finding an outlet to share successes from the getting rid of stupid stuff program is also important. This can be through a monthly, weekly or daily newsletter.

“We have an internal newsletter that goes out regularly where we talk about the successful changes we have made with the help of suggestions from the team,” said Dr. Ashton. “But there are so many of our meetings where now it comes up just sort of naturally in conversation that, ‘Well that might be stupid. Maybe we shouldn't do that.’ It's just part of the way we talk to each other now.”

The AMA 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.

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