

INDUSTRY INSIGHTS

Five Ways Access Centers can Play a Vital Role in Responding to the Challenges of COVID-19

Health systems, hospitals and clinics across the country have deployed multifaceted strategies for coping with the COVID-19 pandemic. Many of these measures are highly visible, from the placement of tents and blockades outside emergency departments, to the conversion of off-campus buildings into dedicated COVID-19 treatment centers.

Less conspicuous, but just as crucial, is the role of the health system access center. In fact, a properly staffed, well-run access center plays a vital role in responding effectively to the challenges of COVID-19, such as intelligently stratifying risk, preventing inappropriate ED use, safely transporting and initially managing infected patients, optimizing capacity utilization, and ensuring that COVID-19 patients receive prompt, targeted care while minimizing risk to other patients, clinicians, and staff.

Following are five specific measures your access center should take to optimize care and minimize risk during the COVID-19 crisis, consistent with [CDC guidelines](#):

1 Implement a robust screening process

Triage is a core component of preventing facility overcrowding, along with guiding providers and patients to the appropriate resources. In the access center, a screening workflow, based on CDC guidelines, will stratify each patient's exposure risk. Given the rapidly emerging (almost daily) new information, these workflows and screening

questions must be quickly alterable as new CDC recommendations are released.

Screening must occur with every transfer case, not selectively or intermittently. This will prevent missing medium and high-risk cases, or even cases that are known, because the focus was drawn to other reasons for transfer (e.g., trauma). The assumption should be that a patient is COVID-19 positive, unless ruled out.

Through an effective screening process, coupled with downstream notifications, you will ensure that patients are safely managed at every step of the transfer process (see #3 below). At the same time, by extending the reach and influence of your access center (see #4 below), you will more readily guide patients and their providers to the appropriate levels of care and treatment venues, and you'll avoid overwhelming ED and inpatient resources.

2 Intelligently determine the appropriate care setting and resources

Guided by data from the screening process, your access center agents will determine the appropriate placement/location for each known or potential COVID-19 patient. This determination addresses decisions regarding level of care (med/surg, tele, IMC, ICU, etc.), the use of a dedicated facility where patients are cohorted, or placement in another temporary setting. The key is to transfer patients directly to

the most appropriate end-point of care, thus avoiding improper use of high-acuity resources or unnecessarily routing patients through the ED, which creates bottlenecks and additional staff and patient exposures.

As surge conditions make resource allocation decisions even more difficult, the access center will, in certain instances, readily **facilitate alternative methods to assist referring providers with their patients through telehealth consultation, remote monitoring, visiting nurses, or other means.**

Avoiding unnecessary transfers keeps beds available for patients requiring acute and intensive care only available at certain locations. Already we have seen these considerations become crucial in New York, Washington, and many locations internationally where COVID-19 case volumes have rapidly increased.

3 Alert all at-risk stakeholders about patient status

All personnel involved in a known or medium to high-risk COVID-19 patient transfer need advance notification so they can appropriately prepare for and transport the patient. This includes donning appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE), readying isolation rooms, and having appropriate staff available. Automatic push notifications ensure that this essential information reaches each stakeholder on a consistent basis.

When setting up notifications, make certain that all stakeholders are in the loop. For example, a fire department may transport a patient with a traumatic head injury who, based on the access center's screening, may

also be at high risk for COVID-19. With advance notification, they can protect themselves with the appropriate PPE, which they might not otherwise have done.

4 Serve as a hub for consumers with COVID-19 questions

Transfer and access centers are generally focused on service to referring providers. However, many organizations are extending their focus to interact directly with patients. During this pandemic, residents of communities have been seeking answers about symptoms they're experiencing, as well as concerns about information accuracy, testing, and much more. Consequently, they may overwhelm clinic or hospital phone lines with inquiries, or they may even go to an urgent care center or to the ED for nonemergent reasons. All of this diverts valuable resources needed in other areas.

Your access center can alleviate this pressure and mitigate risks by serving as a community information hub. In many cases, access centers are implementing and publicizing a special "vanity" phone number for consumers to call. Non-clinical personnel, who are temporarily assigned to work in the transfer center respond to initial calls according to protocols, transferring them to clinical personnel as needed. This reduces general phone line congestion, creates strong goodwill with the community, decreases the exposure risks inherent with walk-ins, and allows people who should self-isolate and shelter-in-place to do so confidently.

5 Capture data to assist with planning and response

The data captured from patient transfer activities, as well as from calls to the COVID-19 information line, are very valuable as your organization tracks activity across the community and assesses changes in the infection curve over time. Additionally, infection clusters can be readily identified based on referring or home locations. Outcomes data, both for transferred and telehealth patients, can be

tracked to enable the tailoring of future treatment protocols.

Accurate, real-time answers to these and other questions, when presented in at-a-glance dashboards and easy-to-understand reports, enable your decision-makers to more proactively and effectively respond to the pandemic, even as the situation rapidly evolves. In addition, data generated by your transfer center can benefit the business side of your organization, particularly as you strive to judiciously allocate finite resources.

Want more information or assistance
with elevating your access center's
response to the COVID-19 pandemic?

[CONTACT US →](#)

About Central Logic

Managing patient transfers is a life-saving endeavor. Central Logic is a pioneer in the space and was founded to support this mission. Our flexible, purpose-built solutions provide superior real-time visibility and unmatched business intelligence to optimize the operations of health system transfer centers. Clients count on Central Logic to deliver strong growth, find new ways to improve patient outcomes and make their operations more effective, today and into the future. Based in Utah, Central Logic is an industry leader with a 95% customer retention rate. The company has been named a "fastest growing private company" by both Inc. 500 and Utah Business Magazine. For more information, visit www.centrallogic.com.

CentralLogic 

100 W Towne Ridge Pkwy, Ste 350
Sandy, UT 84070
Corporate Offices: 866-932-4333

www.centrallogic.com
linkedin.com/company/central-logic
© 2020 Central Logic, Inc.

