Integrating TriageLogic™ Triage Nurse on Call™ with physician EHR systems

by Ravi K. Raheja, MD, CEO

In order to give patients the best possible care, it is critical to stay at the leading edge of technology and to continuously develop new products. An exciting recent development at TriageLogic™ is the ability to offer an affordable integration engine that integrates every physician's electronic health record system (EHR) with our nurse triage Call Center Software™. This means real time, two-way communication between the triage software and our physicians' EHR.

As health care providers, we know that using the best information available to care for our patients is a priority. Providing an integrated system with our Nurse Triage on Call™ software will allow subscribing physicians to have real-time information about the triage encounter, and it will give our nurses access to an updated medical summary for each caller.

There are multiple advantages of such systems for practices looking for better data utilization. For example, an integrated system allows data aggregation for cost-saving studies.

Another advantage of integration is that it ensures that all triage documentation reaches the provider automatically and immediately. Integration bypasses the manual steps of faxing the encounter, scanning it in, and attaching it to the patient record. It also ensures that the information is available to providers in real time.

Practices invest a significant amount of time and money into their EHR. Nurse Triage centers should be able to utilize that resource to better help patients. However, it is not practical for a nurse to access every

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After Hours Nurse Triage on Call™ Experience with Murfreesboro Medical Clinic

Murfreesboro Medical Clinic and Surgicenter is an independently owned clinic composed of 20 specialties. Murfreesboro was founded in 1949 and today has nearly 500 associates on staff. They see over 30,000 patients per month and average 150 new patients per week—and that number is growing. One of their biggest challenges has been improving and streamlining their management of patient calls after hours and on weekends and holidays.

Murfreesboro Medical Clinic believes that having TriageLogic's Nurse Triage on Call has been a benefit for both their patients and physicians. Tammy Higgins, Pediatric Office Manager at Murfreesboro says, “We have 15 pediatricians in our group with numerous patients that need a call back after hours, on weekends and/or holidays and they get a response from a nurse quickly regarding their medical issues.”

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Chair’s Message

ROI from Nurse Telephone Triage Calls – Survey of Patient Calls

By Charu G. Raheja, PhD

Health care providers are increasingly being asked to show improved patient outcomes through continuity of care. At the same time, there is a need to decrease costs through better utilization of health care dollars. Telephone triage has played an important role in satisfying these demands. Research clearly shows that nurse triage on call significantly decreases patient use of emergency rooms. But an important issue given the recent regulations and requirements by insurance companies is how to show cost savings from a nurse triage program.

There are several ways to show cost savings, and TriageLogic™ works very closely with our healthcare partners to help them document their savings. A key strength of TriageLogic is our detailed data management capabilities, based on our extensive experience in designing effective finance and business management systems.

For example, in my last letter, I discussed a survey of patients involving a sample of about 35,500 phone calls during August through November of 2011. Out of those patients, about 11,000 patients said that they would need to go to the ER if they did not have access to a nurse. Only a fraction of the patients planning to go to the ER actually needed immediate care (that is, only 30% of the callers were sent to the ER).

The cost savings and return on investment (ROI) implications from this result are significant. The average cost of an unnecessary visit to the emergency room is about $1,000, and based on our survey and the surveys of other published papers, about 70% of the people who go the emergency room would not need to be there if they could have talked to a nurse on the phone. Given that the cost of a nurse phone call is about $15 per call, this would mean a return on investment of 833%!

The figure below shows cost savings with and without nurse triage on call.

In this way, the nurse triage on-call program is able to save significant amounts of healthcare resources and improve overall care by making a nurse available to all patients, whether or not they seek emergency care. As shown above, the savings from the use of nurse triage can be documented, thus satisfying the current demands for improved patient care along with better and more efficient use of healthcare resources.
CEO Perspective: Integrating TriageLogic™ Triage Nurse on Call™ with physician EHR systems . . . continued from page 1

EHR to review the patient call for each caller. The implications are significant for triaging chronically ill patients and preventing hospital readmissions. Regular callers feel like the nurse on the phone really knows them and that the nurse is working in conjunction with the physician, which creates a good relationship. This rapport encourages them to call back and can further decrease ER usage.

Yet another advantage of integration is improved reporting capabilities. As individual practices and health care organizations are required to provide better care while lowering costs, the reporting capabilities of the triage call centers are going to play a significant role in reimbursement and performance evaluation (See our Chair message on ROI studies, also in this issue). Having a fully integrated system provides the ability to aggregate data in a meaningful way and prove outcomes to payers.

An integrated software and EMR system allows triage nurses to review an updated medical summary of the patient from the physician’s EMR in a secure, standardized format.

By using data from the practices and the triage center combined with the appropriate reporting tools built into the system, access to relevant and customized data becomes readily available.

For practices interested in electronic transfer of information, our integration engine can be expanded so that the medical summary of the patient and triage encounter can be made available to affiliated emergency rooms and other facilities through secure HIPAA-compliant portals. For example, a patient who is seen in the office that day calls after hours triage and is told to go to the emergency room. The ER physician will be able to see relevant data from the office and the triage nurse to provide more coordinated care. As part of the system, the emergency room visit can also be put back directly into the practice EMR. All of this can be accomplished with completely secure, HIPAA compliant systems.

In sum, providing an integrated EHR system with our Nurse Triage on Call™ software has many practical and healthcare advantages, and it ultimately improves physicians’ ability to provide the best possible care to patients.

Case study: Decreasing Triage Center Costs by Combining Outsource Nurse Triage on Call™ with Call Center Solution™ Software

Background:
Last year, a large, leading provider of healthcare services serving a four-county region of 1.5 million people was looking to reduce healthcare costs. Their medical center was established in 1995 and includes over 80 physicians, nurse practitioners and physician assistants. The center has chosen to remain anonymous for this case study.

Challenge:
Rising health care costs and increasing incentives from government organizations are making it crucial for medical centers to look for ways to improve the allocation of patient care and decrease overall health care costs. Last year this particular center decided to revamp their after-hours call center to provide improved after hours care and decrease unnecessary Emergency Department utilizations.

Nurse telephone triage dramatically reduces medical costs by ensuring that patients are getting the care that they need at the right time. After an extensive search, this center selected TriageLogic based on their value pricing and expertise in triage call centers. TriageLogic worked closely with their staff to implement the new software, train their nurses and restart their after-hours call center in house. continued on p 4
Client Spotlight: After Hours Nurse Triage Implemented at Murfreesboro...continued from p. 1

The advice patients receive is based on the care protocols designed and tested by Dr. Schmitt and Dr. Thompson, which can save them a visit to the ER during the night as well as relieve the physicians from getting calls after they leave the office.

“Our pediatricians receive a detailed note in the office the next morning with the information that was given to their patient so they can follow up as needed,” notes Higgins.

In choosing an after-hours nurse triage service, Murfreesboro looked for quick call back times, accurate information, compassionate nurses and weekend/holiday coverage. They also sought efficiency and consistency in call management.

“We had found in our previous experience that call-back times could take hours and that holiday coverage was hard to find,” says Higgins. Night calls are more involved because the doctor’s offices are closed, and these calls require more extensive protocols and documentation. They also require nurses to be able to contact the doctor on call if necessary.

Murfreesboro was particularly happy with the way TriageLogic was able to customize their approach to ensure the best possible coverage of patient calls. Higgins says, “Ravi approached our group and we decided to make the change and we have been very happy with our decision. The TriageLogic system was adapted to our needs and was easy to implement. In addition, Ravi has always been available when we needed him.”

Case study: Decreasing Triage Center Costs...continued from p. 2

Once their new staff was settled and the call center was running efficiently, the medical center wanted to investigate how to further optimize the cost effectiveness of the new call center. The center was receiving close to 20,000 calls a year, but only about 300 calls a month from midnight until 8 am. The center was losing money when the call volume was very low because their nurses were sitting idle waiting for phone calls. Charu Raheja, Chair and CEO of TriageLogic, worked with the call center team to come up with a customized approach to accomplish this.

Solution:

The team decided to combine TriageLogic’s Call Center Software™ with their Nurse Triage on Call™ program. They use their own nurses during high volume times so their nurses are busy. Overnight when the call volume drops, TriageLogic’s nurses handle the phone calls. By outsourcing during those low call volume, the call center is able to continue providing triage service, and at the same time reduce cost during the low volume. This combination is accomplished seamlessly with the call center technology, integration engines and communication platforms in the TriageLogic software.

Cost Savings to the Health Center: Since implementing the combined model, the system has been able to save about 50% of their cost during the low volume period, or about $48,000 a year.

This model allowed the medical center to continue to provide the same level of service, while decreasing its operating costs and working within a given budget. continued on p 7
Improve Care and Decrease Costs: What are your Options When Setting up a Nurse Triage System?

by Charu G. Raheja, PhD and Ravi K. Raheja, M.D.

TriageLogic has been approached by several organizations who received funding towards controlling soaring health care costs. Many of these organizations have now become clients because TriageLogic was able to help them improve care while decreasing costs. In this article, we review and explain the process involved in setting up a nurse triage system and the different options for clients looking into setting one up.

First, as we know every patient encounter starts with a phone call. The people answering the phones need to triage patients efficiently and effectively so that care is coordinated and resources are allocated to those needing them. To show cost savings, practices and medical organizations also need to be able to survey patients and document return on investments. We have developed several modules in our software to help our clients show cost savings.

HOW DO YOU SET UP A NURSE TRIAGE SYSTEM?

The evolution of new technology has made several cost-effective options available and TriageLogic’s clients are using each one of these options. They are: (a) do it yourself in-house (and hire your own nurses), (b) outsource to a nurse triage center, (c) use a combination of in-house and outsourcing.

a) Do it yourself in-house: start your own call center

Starting your own call center involves setting up the call center infrastructure. The requirements include hiring an experienced call center manager, purchasing triage software for night-time protocols, and hiring clinical and non-clinical staff. Having your own system gives you the flexibility to perform multiple tasks in addition to triage such as physician referrals, scheduling, disease management, class registration and surveys. The organizations most likely to succeed with this approach are larger organizations with high call volumes, who expect to handle over 50,000 triage calls a year. These companies are the right fit because they already have some call center infrastructure and they just need to add to it. The high call volume also allows the center to use nurses’ time efficiently.

b) Outsource to a nurse triage center

In this option, you outsource the nurse triage function to TriageLogic. The advantage of this option is that it has a relatively low upfront start-up cost. You do not need to train your nursing staff and there is no need for human resources and IT staff. In addition, expenses are based on usage, so there is no fixed overhead for your organization. Since we already have the call center infrastructure, we are also able to start-up practices and hospitals quickly and show an immediate return on investment. In addition, for practices looking for a more seamless experience, our software is also able to integrate directly with Electronic Medical Records.

c) Use a combination of in-house and outsourced services

In this model, the organization uses its own nurse triage software and nurses during high call volumes and outsources the triage calls to TriageLogic during low call volumes. A combined model can prove to be a way to improve services and decrease costs. Many triage centers lose money when the call volume is very low because nurses are sitting idle waiting for phone calls. By outsourcing during those low volume times, you can continue to provide service and reduce cost. This combination can be accomplished seamlessly with our call center technology and integration engines and communication platforms.

In sum, soaring health care costs and increasing incentives from government organizations are making it crucial that we look for ways to improve the allocation of patient care. Nurse triage is a solution that can dramatically reduce medical calls by making sure that patients are getting the care that they need at the right time. Not only does it reduce costs, it also improves patient satisfaction because it gives patients access to a supportive and knowledgeable person who can help them.
TriageLogic in the News

Answerstat cover story written by Dr. Ravi Raheja and Dr. Charu Raheja

"Using Nurse Triage to Improve Care And Decrease Costs: Options Available for ACOs and Medical Organizations," an article written by Dr. Charu Raheja and Dr. Ravi Raheja, TriageLogic Chair and TriageLogic CEO, respectively, was the cover story in Answerstat Magazine’s October-November issue. The article describes the various nurse triage systems that are available to ACOs—nurse triage being a solution that can reduce medical calls and provide patients immediate access to medical personnel. Also included in the issue is Dr. Ravi Raheja's article "Why Your Nurse Triage Needs to be Integrated with your Clients' Systems." Click here to read the articles on the magazine.

TriageLogic CEO Ravi Raheja and Sue Altman Interviewed for Healthcare Call Center Times

TriageLogic’s CEO and co-founder, Dr. Ravi Raheja, was recently featured in the national publication Healthcare Call Center Times along with Sue Altman, COO of Phoenix-based Schmitt-Thompson Clinical Content. Dr. Raheja described the recent expansion of the telephone triage market for office used during the day, explaining how savings in training time and call processing are driving the push to implement computerized telephone triage: "Books are inexpensive but cumbersome and time-consuming, and traditional call center protocols require substantially greater training time than computerized telephone triage. Computerized systems such as TriageLogic’s Office Solution™ software provide both cost and time savings in these areas. In addition, there are significant differences in triage protocols for day or night. For example, a parent whose child can be seen by a doctor during the day might need to be sent to the ER at night."

TriageLogic announces integration module for patient EHR

TriageLogic announces a new software module for its Call Center Solution™ software that allows medical practices to integrate their electronic health records with our Nurse Triage on Call™ program. It will allow the nurses to bypass all the manual steps of each encounter and makes the information available to providers in real time.

“Medical providers understand that being able to see a patient’s history is going to have huge implications in triaging chronically ill patients and patients recently discharged from hospitals,” according to Dr. Ravi Raheja, MD. Click here for the complete Nurse Triage on Call press release.

TriageLogic Announces New iPad App

We have been finding that medical organizations are becoming increasingly comfortable with using tablets. Using the iPad speeds the triage process because navigation is easier and protocols load faster. Due to their portability and ease-of-use, iPads provide the ability to work remotely and flexibility that many call centers are now offering their nurses.

TriageLogic is also providing cost savings, due to the ease and flexibility of maintaining and updating an iPad, while allowing nurses to work from home or at the call center. The significantly lower price of an iPad compared with the price of a computer is another advantage. From a business/managerial standpoint, iPads provide flexibility and the ability to work remotely at any time.

Ginny Gill, RN and owner of Connect RN triage services, has been using the app for her nurses and says, “The biggest asset to this application is its portability; it is unequalled. Many of my nurses are home-based and they frequently travel, and this app allows them to take calls from almost anywhere. From a managerial perspective, I can easily watch the queue activity and jump in when I need to assist.”
Employee Spotlight: Carla Price
Triage Expert Trains Nurses

Carla Price, RN, has been a nurse for the last 14 years, with experience in PACU and ER. Carla has been working for TriageLogic training nurses and sharing her expertise in telephone triage and office triage software for the last several years now. She gets nurses up and running quickly with the software and with the protocols developed by Dr. Schmitt and Dr. Thompson.

About the software
Doctors and nurses voiced the need to ensure their patient’s daytime calls are answered properly and recorded and documented in their patient medical records for future reference. The only option available for provider offices was to use paper-based triage manuals, which are cumbersome and inefficient.

Therefore, we developed an expanded software program called TriageLogic Office Solution™, which offers triage support for provider offices during normal office hours. This affordable program helps standardize patient care information to improve patient call outcomes and decrease physician liability, because call information can be downloaded or copied into a patient’s chart.

The TriageLogic Office Solution is a web-based application that can be integrated with any electronic medical record and works seamlessly with other office technologies. It is also very easy to learn, and multiple nurses can answer calls while following the standard protocols.

About the training
Carla Price takes care of all the training needed for office nurses on how to use the TriageLogic office software, so office managers need not take on additional training responsibilities. Each week, Carla provides ongoing training via Webex on Tuesdays at noon EST. Clients can sign up online or by emailing her directly.
She trains new clients as well as any of their new employees. Carla’s friendly and outgoing personality makes the sessions fun, interactive and educational. TriageLogic’s software is very user-friendly, which allows new nurses to get up and running quickly. Nursing staff can download and start using TriageLogic Office Solution™ in 30 minutes or less, and no hardware or IT support is needed.

Case study: Decreasing Triage Center Costs...continued from page 4

It also allowed them to keep their current infrastructure and resources.

Conclusion:
A combined model is an effective way to improve services and decrease costs. When the call volume is very low, call centers often lose money because nurses are idle waiting for phone calls. By outsourcing during those low volume times, the call center can solve this problem. These organizations may also be able to expand into other areas of call center work to increase revenues.

By using sophisticated technology and highly trained nurses, TriageLogic has helped call centers improve patient care while decreasing costs.