E-BOOK SERIES

Finding the Right Healthcare Quality Software
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With all the options out there, hunting down the right healthcare quality software solution isn’t easy. When the solution you’re choosing is responsible for capturing some of your organization’s most vital information, it’s not a decision to be taken lightly.

This guide was created for all healthcare quality staff who currently use software—or are considering using software—to track their patient safety & experience improvements. We’ll guide you through all your options, whether you’re just getting started or you’re ready to go!

The guide provides answers to these critical questions:

- What is healthcare quality software?
- Why is it important?
- What should you be tracking?
- What are the methods for tracking data and improvements?
- What should you be looking for in a healthcare quality software vendor?
- How can I convince my organization to buy healthcare quality software?
Healthcare quality software: the nitty-gritty

Healthcare quality software is a big umbrella term for software that helps healthcare organizations track, analyze and report their patient safety and experience data. This can include software for:

- Incident reporting
- Risk management
- Root cause analysis
- Peer review
- Infection surveillance
- Quality management
- Patient experience

Why do you need software?

It boils down to what your math teacher told you back in primary school: Show your work. It doesn't matter how much you improve quality at your healthcare organization if you can't show the results. Healthcare quality software puts the data you need at your fingertips to show you what's working and what isn't—so you can put your resources where they matter most, and prove its value.

Tracking healthcare quality metrics

As the market shifts to a value-based system, improving performance on quality measures is essential to achieve safer care. The Institute of Health estimates that preventable medical errors cost the healthcare industry $17-29 billion each year. And with a seemingly endless list of regulatory bodies, keeping track of what you need to keep track of can be a full time job itself! Here are some of things you can track:

- **Quality measures:**
  - Good catches and near misses, Readmissions, Antimicrobial stewardship best practices
- **Patient experience:**
  - Rounding data, Grievances, Complaints & compliments,
    - Statistics (outpatient no-shows, emergency department wait times, etc.)
- **Patient safety:**
  - Adverse events, Medication errors, Patient falls, HAIs
You’re probably already tracking your quality data and improvement plan in some way. Whether that’s on paper or electronically—or some combination of the two—you’ve probably noticed some gaps that need filling in the process. Or you may just be ready for something more efficient altogether. Otherwise, you probably wouldn’t be reading this!

We’ll walk you through the reasons why you might want to switch from one method to another, arming you with evidence can take to your boss to convince her that software is worth the investment.

**The methods we’ll go over are:**

- Paper
- Spreadsheets
- Homegrown systems
- Multiple systems
- Other electronic systems
What you need to know about switching from...paper

Yes, paper. We know you’re still out there. Don’t worry—we get it, it’s a straightforward method to document information, with little to no learning curve and it’s inexpensive. Who can argue with that?

Over the past few years, the options available to organizations looking for technology-based solutions have increased greatly. This is due to the rapid evolution of software development techniques, the move towards open-source software and the wealth of software packages from vendors around the world.

As healthcare organizations make the move from other methods of tracking their healthcare quality data, they need to prove the value of purchasing software. Change isn’t easy. It can be expensive, time-consuming and involve a lot of people. So it’s important to understand the benefits of switching before you leap in.

How managing healthcare risks and complaints on paper is only giving you half the story. We can shop for goods, track a flight status and schedule a dinner reservation all online. But when a patient is misdiagnosed, why is this tracked and filed on paper? Hospitals don’t have time to wait for such pertinent information to be faxed or mailed around.
Switching from paper: Grand Itasca used to use a combination of an in-house database and paper forms to report incidents. Lynn Schweiberger, the clinic’s Quality Director, recounts, “When I came in, there were just a bunch of these blue paper forms everywhere. And only one employee knew how to enter the events into the Access system. So when she wasn’t there, everything came to a halt. We’d find forms on managers’ desks—3, 4, even 5 months later—that were never routed back to the Quality department. It was pretty chaotic.”

Since Grand Itasca switched to using RL6, the clinic has seen great improvements in its event reporting with almost 2000 complaints and events now captured in the system. For Lynn, RL6 has provided huge cost savings in terms of time. “It used to take us so much time and rework reviewing the paper forms to evaluate whether events had been reported”, she says. “With RL6, there’s no second guessing.”

When it comes to tracking and managing adverse events, paper-based systems fall short. Sure, it’s a cost-efficient option and it’s easier to set up than a complex software system, but there are drawbacks:

- They're time consuming and inefficient
- Paper has limited reporting and trending capabilities
- You're likely to get incomplete forms, especially ones missing mandatory fields
- It's difficult to decide what information to capture on the form
- It's time consuming to modify existing forms
- They're easily lost
- Paper forms impede a reporting culture
Although the CHART member-hospitals jointly share risk, risk management is not centrally managed and each hospital’s risk manager used a different method of reporting risk and patient safety events. Without a shared taxonomy and database, CHART could not compare events or share trend reports across its membership, or identify benchmarking opportunities.

Additionally, the majority of CHART hospitals used a paper-based system for event reporting resulting in paper forms being misplaced, difficulty reading handwriting on the forms and delays in departments submitting forms to risk managers (and often in large batches). The risk managers across the CHART member-hospitals formed a taskforce to identify key requirements for a system-wide risk management process. After evaluating different systems, CHART selected RL Solutions’ risk management software due to its customization capabilities and ease-of-use.

Paper-based systems can be time consuming, and can make it next to impossible to aggregate all the patient safety data hospitals need. It can take weeks and sometimes months to collect enough information worthy of conducting any kind of analysis to uncover trends.

What you need to know about switching from...a homegrown system

If you build it, they will come. Except... they won’t always. Some hospitals choose to build their own patient safety reporting systems rather than purchase one off the shelf. In-house systems are great because they’re customized to your facility and workflow. And if you’re using software to manage your patient safety data, you’re ahead of lots of other hospitals who are still using paper or spreadsheets. But there are drawbacks to building software in-house.
• Hospital IT resources are taxed to the max. Hospitals are just as capable as software vendors of acquiring the necessary talent they need in order to build their own quality software solutions. However, if your team is already busy with large-scale IT projects, like an EHR implementation, do you really want to add another thing on their plate? Better to choose something that’s easy to implement and has top-notch support. Finding the right team is just one more thing you’d have to do before you start. Find the right vendor, and let them find the team!

• In-house systems aren’t very scalable. Just because an in-house system suits your needs now, doesn’t mean that will always be the case. Hospitals are rapidly changing places with new facilities being added all the time, mergers & acquisitions and ever-changing regulatory changes. While you may not find the need for additional features at the moment, you may find that as your organization grows and changes that having them available will come in handy.

• External software vendors are upfront about project timelines. If they don’t meet your deadlines, there can be financial and reputational consequences. That’s harder when you’re dealing with colleagues. Also, you will always find yourself at the mercy of whoever has built your solution. With this said however, one should not discount the fact that in today’s hyper-competitive software market, vendors have to be much more responsive to the needs of their customers than they have in the past.

• Software is only part of the solution. Once the system is installed, you’ll need to train users, which is easier when you’re working with an external vendor that has a proven implementation approach and training documentation. Going with an established company also opens up other options. For example, RL has a vibrant user community to share ideas and best practices and our team will help you promote your system at your hospital to ensure users actually use it!

Brigham & Women’s Hospital

BWH used to use a homegrown online reporting system that was novel for its time but the hospital quickly outgrew its capabilities. The system required considerable IT resources for any changes and it did not support documenting near misses. BWH decided look for an electronic reporting system that was customizable, fast and user-friendly and with excellent technical support services to ensure it could be adequately maintained in the long run.

After an exhaustive evaluation of several vendors, BWH ultimately chose RL6:Risk. Since implementing Risk, BWH has experienced a 25% increase in reported patient safety events. As well, 80% of all the events reported are near misses (including severity “0” and “1” events), up from 50%. Risk’s simple platform allowed BWH to customize the software, without using IT resources, and its easy reporting tools mean that the quality of the information has improved.
• Users don't tolerate ugly software anymore. Two-thirds of Americans own a smartphone so most of us are familiar with what well-designed technology looks like. If you spend all that time building a system that works but you don't invest resources in designing the user experience, staff won't use the system.

What you need to know about switching from... spreadsheets

For smaller hospitals or healthcare facilities with a manageable amount of patient safety data, spreadsheets can be a great tool. You can calculate formulas and tabulate data quickly. They’re an easy place to collect information and do basic statistical analysis: but then what? Here are six reasons you should stop using spreadsheets to track your patient safety reports.

• You still need a form to submit. Spreadsheets are great for compiling large amounts of data. But when something happens (adverse event, patient complaint, etc.) you need a form for the front-line staff to describe what happened. Since the form and spreadsheet aren’t linked, someone has to transpose that data into the spreadsheet. That’s additional work—and more opportunities for mistakes.
• **Trending and analysis is limited.** You have all this data – what do you do with it? If you see a trend, you can make changes to improve processes but then you’ll have to track those improvements in yet another spreadsheet! Comprehensive patient safety software helps you take your data and learn from it: perform a root cause analysis, build a process improvement plan, collaborate on a peer review, etc.

• **There’s no audit trail.** Electronic reporting software, like RL6, shows you who made changes to a file. You can’t track that in Excel! If you need more information on an event, software makes it easier to know who to follow-up with for more details.

• **It’s difficult to track follow-up & share results.** Spreadsheets make it easy to share data by attaching a file to an email or posting reports on a bulletin board. But what comes next? With software, you can easily track the follow-up actions on file—and see if someone isn’t following up in a timely manner. This is especially important when you’re responding to grievances.

• **There are no alerts.** Not all errors are created equal. Certain events require faster follow-up, such as an employee needle stick or Narcan administration. When events are entered into software, you can receive alerts in real-time (TIP: the really useful software lets you customize those alerts and even receive them on your phone). If you wait for the data to be entered into a spreadsheet, odds are that the patient is long gone by the time you find out, limiting the opportunity for service recovery.

• **Spreadsheets are prone to errors.** Acute-care hospitals are complex environments and many factors can contribute to staff making mistakes. Automating the incident reporting process eliminates potentially dangerous human errors that can happen every day. RL6 even links with other systems like ADT so you have to type out the same data every time.

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**SUNNYBROOK HEALTH SCIENCES CENTRE**

Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre needed a tool to accurately collect the information gathered during walkarounds. The hospital wanted something to track its progress, report on the data and promote a fast turnaround of the priority issues. The walkarounds support team also required status reports and trend charts that identify underlying issues.

After years of using Excel spreadsheets, RL worked with Sunnybrook to adapted its patient feedback software to monitor activities related to walkarounds. Sunnybrook spent two months customizing Feedback to adapt it for use with walkarounds, using its existing spreadsheets and adapted them to fit the structures of Feedback.
What you need to know about switching from... multiple systems

Very few healthcare facilities exist as independent entities anymore. Health systems are merging, consolidating staff, procedures and electronic systems. And it’s not just hospitals! Health systems are purchasing physician practices, ambulatory clinics, rehab and home care facilities, pharmacies and more.

Making everyone agree on how to track and report data can be a full-time job. But with the increased attention to quality and patient experience metrics, it’s not something healthcare organizations can afford to ignore.

Kaiser Permanente Northwest

*KP Northwest was struggling with managing multiple ways of tracking patient safety data at different locations. In 2013, KP Northwest was opening a new hospital, the first one to open in the Portland metro area in 30 years. So the team wanted to do it right! However, KP Northwest realized that it had three different processes for tracking patient safety events:*

- Web-based system at the existing hospital
- Paper-based reporting process at ambulatory clinics
- An entirely different system and process for its non-patient care department
KP Northwest’s executive leadership wanted a system that provided more analysis and trending throughout multiple business units, most notably risk management and workplace safety. They also wanted something that worked for front-line users and other business units could use as well. Because of this, KP Northwest decided to purchase RL6:Risk and consolidated all of its locations on the one reporting system.

The benefits of having everyone on one electronic system:

• Better trending and analysis of quality and patient experience data with a shared taxonomy

• Comprehensive reports that you can share internally and externally, such as with regulatory bodies and PSOs

• Integrates with systems like EHRs, ADT, pharmacy and more

• Community support from others using the same system, from best practices to support through implementation to custom configurations

• Scalable! That means multiple modules that work together and a system powerful enough to handle the addition of new facilities.

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Partners Continuing Care

Homegrown systems offer these benefits too but they have their own drawbacks which Partners Continuing Care (PCC), part of the Partners HealthCare system, realized a few years ago. Some facilities were using paper forms while others used homegrown electronic systems to report safety events, and facilities used different taxonomies to classify severity. This variability made it difficult for the quality staff and system leadership to identify actionable trends. They all needed technology that would support the preexisting culture. In 2012, PCC starting using RL6 to capture adverse events. Now, all of PCC’s home healthcare and rehab staff use RL6 to report incidents, using customized forms to capture information such as additional harms from falls.
What you need to know about switching from... another electronic system

Some things are easy to change like toothpaste or taking a new route to work. Other things require a little more effort and planning, such as switching your insurance provider or setting up a new cell phone. Switching to a new healthcare quality system? That's a lot of work—but if you find the right one, it's absolutely worth the effort.

The top 5 reasons our clients switched to RL include:

• **Flexibility**: You know your hospital's workflow better than anyone else. RL doesn't limit how many locations you can add to the system hierarchy and lets you configure all your forms and reports.

• **Easier event entry**: Hospitals can capture better healthcare quality data from their front-line staff with RL's dynamic & intelligent forms. Reduce errors by linking to systems like ADT and pharmacy to auto-populate fields. In addition, RL's mobile app works with our Risk, Feedback and Claims management software, so you can increase your submission rates.

• **Reports & dashboards**: RL's powerful DIY report builder means you don't need IT to build reports for you anymore. Plus, drill down to analyze your data and make improvements. RL also has powerful dashboards that help healthcare organizations interpret their data to find out what it really means. This helps you identify trends, prevent reoccurrences and improve quality of care.
• **Real-time surveillance:** You can add surveillance to our Risk or Infection Control software to proactively prevent harm. Screen your data feeds—lab, ADT, radiology, EHR, pharmacy and surgery—and receive real-time alerts for never events, vital risk triggers, readmissions, infections and more. With all this data in your corner, you’ll be able to proactively act on potentially harmful situations and minimize escalation.

• **Client experience:** At RL, we take great pride in the relationships that we have established with our clients. Whether it’s in person or online, or anywhere in between, we will do our best to make your experience the best it can possibly be.

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**10 Things to Look for in a Patient Safety Software Vendor**

There are a ton of companies out there that are offering you the latest and greatest products designed to help your business in one way or another. All of them do something their competitor doesn’t do, or they do it faster and better. So, when it comes to choosing a vendor, what should you look for to ensure you’re making the right choice? Here are 10 things you should consider when you’re evaluating software vendors.
1. **Look for a company that invests in research and development.** Don’t be afraid to ask how much of a company’s revenue goes back into R&D. After all, it’s essentially an investment in technology and future capabilities, which is transformed into new products processes and services. Asking this will give you an idea of the company’s vision for the future – a company that doesn’t reinvest into its own product is short-sighted, will never evolve and is likely to leave you high and dry somewhere down the road. You want a company who is committed to bringing you new and innovative solutions, or can – at the very least – improve on their existing products.

2. **Choose a product that is easy to use.** One of the biggest challenges hospitals face when introducing a new tool – no matter the size or the type of tool – is getting people to use it. Understandably, as the introduction of new software is perceived as something additional to do or learn. The easier and more straightforward the software is for them to use, the more likely your staff will be willing to welcome it into their daily routine.

3. **Find something that suits your organization’s needs.** Every hospital is different. Be it in size, specializations or workflow – no two hospitals are the same. There’s no sense in having tools or fields that you won’t use, or a product that uses terminology that’s not found within your organization. Find a company who will listen, be accommodating and is willing to customize the software to suit your facility.

4. **Use a something that will make your life easier.** Think about your day, and the moments when you’ve said to yourself “if only...” or “I wish...” and look for a product that fulfills those needs. Whether that’s providing you with robust reports so you don’t have to turn to your IT department, real-time alerts or simply gathering more data to jumpstart a patient safety or quality of care initiative, choose a product that helps alleviate your pain points.

5. **Pick something others are using.** You likely have relationships with other hospitals or people in the same field as you – people who have been through this process themselves. Call them up and chat with them to see what they use. Ask about the implementation process, what problems they were experiencing prior and what the product was able to help them solve. Some of the best advice you’ve received throughout your lifetime have been from your friends, so why stop now?

6. **Select software your IT department likes.** Even if you can get the budget approved to purchase new software, the deal can stall if your IT team isn’t on board. Make the decision easier for them by choosing software that doesn’t take IT resources to maintain. Sure, you’ll need their help at implementation time with interfacing and testing. But the last thing you want is to be held up by analysts or your IT department. Find a software that lets you freely, quickly and easily access data, narrow in on the specific information you need and create reports all on your own, without having to rely on others.
7. It’s your data and you’ll store it where you want to. Don’t let your vendor decide where your data goes. Their limitations should not hinder or leave you scrambling to fill the gaps that they’re unable to address. At the end of the day a vendor should be flexible and cater to your needs, so on our off-site that’s your organization’s call and no one else’s.

8. Choose a reputable company. Something many of us naturally do is look for a reputable company. A company that is known industry wide for offering a sound product. This makes total sense, as they’ve spent years earning the trust and respect of those in their industry for them to deserve such acclaim. Most of all, their reputation can go a long way in helping you feel confident in your choice. Once you’ve found the one, take a second to look at their client list to see who else is using their products -- are they equally as reputable? Go one step further and ask or look for case studies and testimonials on their website to get a better idea of what can be achieved with their help in your corner.

9. Go with a company who is healthcare focused. There are a lot of companies out there that have a tendency to dabble in various industries. This, while common and sound in business, is only beneficial to them and not to your organization. With a vendor who is focused on healthcare, you can be certain that all their resources will not only go into understanding the growing needs and requirements in the healthcare space, but also into maintaining and bettering the products you rely on.

10. Pick a company who will be there for you. A company’s culture is more important to you than you think. A company with a positive work environment is more likely to have happy employees who, in turn, are willing to go the extra mile to make you happy. Don’t hesitate to ask about the type of culture they have at the office, or ask to speak to someone on the team other than a sales rep to get a better idea of that type of service you’re going to get. After all, your company is making a significant investment and deserves the same service in return.

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So...what should you do next?

Hopefully this guide has now helped you identify:

- Where your current method falls short
- Some arguments to approach your boss with in favor of switching to software
- What to look for in a vendor when you start your search for a solution

With so many solutions out there, it’s easy to get flustered. Knowing what to look for makes the whole process much easier for everyone involved and you’ll feel truly confident that you’re getting what you need. Although, it may be impossible to check off all these boxes, do your best to identify the items that matter most. Then, make sure whoever you choose fulfills your needs. The closer you come, the happier you’ll be in the end.
Once you find the vendor that’s right for your organization, it’s time to get the buy-in from your team, your manager and the execs. Good luck!

**Discover how RL Solutions can help you with quality management reporting — contact us at 1-888-737-7444 or sales@rlsolutions.com to book a demo today!**

*About RL Solutions*

RL Solutions is a global company that designs healthcare software for patient feedback, infection surveillance, claims management, peer review software, risk management software and root cause analysis software. With over 1600 clients — including healthcare networks, hospitals and long-term care facilities — we pride ourselves on creating and maintaining long-lasting relationships. For more information, visit www.rlsolutions.com, like us on Facebook or follow @rlsolutions on Twitter.