Integrating Your Surgical Facility

Integrating your surgical suite can be a large project. While there are many considerations and decisions to make, here is a list of some of the important factors to think about when it comes to OR integration …

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As surgical procedures advance, the needs of surgeons and surgical teams are changing. While safety and efficiency have always been important factors in the operating room, they have become that much more crucial as procedures evolve to be more complex, budgets tighten, and OR professionals find themselves increasingly crunched for time, finding technological solutions to streamline OR processes is becoming more and more important.

Enter: OR integration. An integrated OR provides staff with the information they need often right at their fingertips, and can connect with all other information systems across the hospital to improve safety, efficiency, time management and workflow.

Integrating your OR can be a large project. While there are many things to consider and decisions to make, here is a list of some of the important factors to think about when integrating your OR.

1. Understand your needs.

According to Kathryn Charles, Information Systems Analyst at Beaufort Memorial Hospital, engaging in exercises to break down the processes taking place in the OR to identify areas for improvement is an excellent—and crucial—place to start.

Charles talked with *Surgical Products* for an article on OR integration in June 2009, after her facility had completed the project of integrating the supply automation system with the OR information systems. The integration has proven to save nurses time, improve supply documentation and accuracy and enhance patient safety.

The first step in their integration involved value stream mapping exercises to break down the processes OR staff went through for each case. This allowed the staff to see where the processes were breaking down, what could be improved, what worked and what didn’t. It allowed them to assess their needs.

2. Get your staff involved and keep them involved.

According to Charles, it’s important to get your staff—and the right members of the staff— involved in the project.

"Make sure you get the right people involved, and by that I mean some dedicated people from the OR, someone who knows the materials management aspect of it, technical support from IT and someone who is going to be committed and dedicated to the project to stay on top of it," she says.

3. Have an intermediary.

As Charles explains, the hospital needs a contact person to work with the vendors and keep the staff engaged in the project. If too much communication is made between vendors and staff members, purchasing decisions can get messy. On the other end, the project can get lost amidst the day-to-day hustle and bustle of the hospital, and not be completed.

"You have to have a central point of communication," she says. "The central contact has to make sure all those other people are involved and engaged in the project. Sometimes that's difficult, but it's very, very critical."

4. Don't think you have to do it all at once.

Integrating an OR can not only be a time-consuming project, but an expensive one. New equipment and systems much be purchases, and while it may have a long-term cost benefit, the upfront investment can be overwhelming for a hospital.

One misconception is that a facility has to implement all integrated equipment at once. According to Al Richards, a senior product manager of the TELEMEDICINE OR Integration system at MAQUET, think about integrating your OR in a modular format. This means a facility implements one part of the system now, and when it has the budget, it can add on to its existing equipment.

"We are trying to develop an option to make our system modular, so if an OR wants just basic video switching right now, they can get that," Richards explains of the company's integration system. "Maybe in next year's budget, they can add the streaming and telemedicine capabilities, but they don't have to buy a new rack or new hardware."

5. Think about the future.

Because it's possible to integrate an OR in steps, think about the future when you're making purchasing decisions related to OR integration. Is the equipment compatible with other equipment? Can it be added on to in the future? Often, OR integration involves a capital investment. Facilities' want to be sure the investment will last more than a few years, but can be upgraded as technology advances.

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