

Cost management, supply chain improvement + more: Health system priorities in a post-pandemic world

By Alia Paavola, Becker's Healthcare

From empty grocery store shelves to medical supply shortages, the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed global supply chain inefficiencies.

The pandemic has hit the healthcare supply chain especially hard, revealing a need to reprioritize how products are procured, distributed and stored.

While improving supply chain processes has always been important for healthcare organizations, the COVID-19 pandemic has pushed the need for transparency and integration to the forefront, explained Shawn McBride, vice president and general manager of WaveMark™ Supply Management & Workflow Solutions at Cardinal Health.

Here, Mr. McBride explains the supply chain challenges illuminated by the COVID-19 pandemic, how a clinically integrated supply chain can support patient care and how health systems' priorities will change in a post-pandemic world.

Editor's Note: Responses have been lightly edited for length and clarity.

Question: What supply chain challenges did the COVID-19 pandemic expose?

Shawn McBride: The pandemic has shown that supply chain can no longer function in the background, but instead needs to be in the forefront of (core to) their business strategy. Health systems are seeing increased pressure from not having visibility into their supply chains. During the pandemic's peak, many providers had difficulty identifying the location of supplies or where they were being used.

In addition, emerging product shortages have reestablished the need to manage the supplies already in the system. This means making sure products are being used effectively, not allowing items on the shelves to expire and proactively managing recalled products. Ineffective supply chain practices not only make it difficult to know where critical products are located, but also exacerbate waste and impact supply chain efficiency. Overall, the pandemic has made it clear that creating transparency and building a clinically integrated supply chain, one that enables the delivery of care and collaborates closely with clinical teams, will be key strategic priorities for health systems.

Q: How can a clinically integrated supply chain help improve patient outcomes?

SMc: A clinically integrated supply chain is critical to preparing for and meeting patient care needs. It ensures clinicians have the right product, at the right time, at the right place. An integrated supply chain allows collaboration between clinicians and supply chain staff to drive better processes. But the benefits are not limited to traditional metrics. Supply chain and clinical staff can also work together to determine the products that yield the best patient outcomes. A supply chain that is particularly mature documents product data and patient outcomes, analyzes them at aggregate levels, to make informed decisions, and suggests a course of action. These analytics can help determine probable outcomes based on patient health factors and products that are used during their care. This gives clinicians the insight that allows them to determine what device will likely yield the best possible result per patient case.¹

Q: How will COVID-19 affect health systems' strategic priorities in the coming months and years?

SMc: Cost management will continue to be paramount. Hospitals have already lost a significant amount of revenue, so managing supply costs while still ensuring clinicians have the necessary products will be front and center.

In addition to supply chain prioritization and cost management, health systems will start implementing solutions to help minimize clinician burnout. Our society depends on physicians and nurses to care for our citizens. This national health crisis has underscored the vital role clinicians play in keeping our country safe and healthy. According to Advisory Board, even in a pre-pandemic environment, healthcare productivity was decreasing as the adoption of technology increased.² Specifically, EMRs are not supporting productivity as they intended. Solutions to help streamline complex workflows or minimize duplicative documentation tasks are going to become more critical.

1. CISOM Maturity Model - HIMSS, Anne Snowdon
2. Advisory Board – "Towards True Sustainability"

To learn more about WaveMark, and how it is helping providers navigate a post-pandemic world, [click here](#). ■