



Nurses on the frontline at the U.S. Dept of Veterans Affairs

Employee involvement in
developing and designing new
health information systems

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Electronic Medical Records

- The US Dept. of Veterans Affairs (VA) has been using components of electronic medical records for decades.
- VA health care employees from clinical positions, medical records, laboratory, pharmacy and information technology were involved in development & testing.
- VA's workforce is highly unionized, with over 60% of VA employee positions covered by unions.

CPRS

- The VA's Computerized Patient Record System (CPRS) developed from a simple "Order Entry/Results Reporting" system to a comprehensive medical record system.
- Front line employee input was solicited at each stage of development, and many clinical nurses and employees were on development teams
- Unions were informed of major initiatives and were permitted to bargain over procedures and appropriate arrangements.

CPRS

- As CPRS evolved to a more comprehensive system, Registered Nurses and other clinicians were recruited as “Clinical Applications Coordinators”.
- Clinical Applications Coordinators (CACs) were, and still mostly are, bargaining unit positions.
- CACs are considered clinical experts and computerized records experts.

BCMA

- In the late 1990's, attempting to decrease medication errors, the VA proposed a "bar code medication administration" (BCMA) system, inspired by FedEx and UPS package tracking systems.
- The VA's National Partnership Council, with 5 national unions and all 3 VA administrations, discussed the initiative and implications and employee concerns.

BCMA

- As the BCMA initiative developed, national unions encouraged locals to become “predecisionally” involved in the local process.
- Local unions were involved in:
 - Product testing and selection
 - Process and procedure development
 - Employee training initiatives
 - Procedure and appropriate arrangement bargaining

BCMA

- BCMA implementation was not without challenges.
- Front line employees and unions were encouraged and empowered to report any systems issues or challenges to resource personnel (CACs or designated others who were on-call 24/7).
- System Enhancement Requests were initiated largely based on employee and union input.

BCMA

- Unions and Management collaborated to encourage front line employees to make use of the system as designed and avoid “short-cuts” and “work-arounds”.
- Exceptions were approved for “emergency situations”.
- Unions also were represented on many committees where BCMA processes and problems were discussed.

Recognition

- The VA's CPRS and BCMA systems have demonstrated quality documentation and reduced medication errors.
- The American Medical Association and others have recognized VA's Electronic Medical System, of which BCMA and CPRS are major components, as national best-practices.

Partnership for Results

■ In summary:

- Unions and front line employee involvement was actively solicited from the beginning
- System development included input from union reps and front line employees in addition to information systems development staff
- End-user feedback from nurses, employees and unions was incorporated into ongoing development and improvement
- A national best practice system resulted

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