

Implementing New Technology: Keys to Success

by Deborah Simmons

In the last issue I covered the need to research training requirements and support in order to establish a training plan and budget as part of your process when adding new technology to your pharmacy. So now you've made the big decision to buy and you've spent a lot of time reviewing the technology, negotiating the contract, and preparing the training plan and budget. It's time to get ready for its implementation. Here are some suggestions on how to make sure your technology roll-out is as smooth as possible.

Involve Your Staff

It's important to involve your staff in the technology implementation plan as soon as you can. They have questions and you need their commitment in order to be successful. While you may be extremely excited about the upcoming new technology, some of your staff may be quite anxious about it. Perhaps they feel uncomfortable with

changing their routine or perhaps they are uncertain as to how it will affect their job status. They may be thinking that they will lose their jobs or have their hours reduced because of it.

Create Excitement

Plan a kick-off meeting as soon as you know the implementation details, to alleviate any concerns your staff may have. Consider including the following points during the meeting:

- A technology overview and review of key features. Ask if your vendor can supply a video or marketing materials with photos to support this meeting. If not, the vendor's web site might be a good source for your staff to see the system, its hardware, screen prints, sample reports, etc.
- Benefits to your practice, your patients, and your staff. Don't forget to emphasize the

"What's in it for me?" from your staff's perspective.

- Impact on current operations.
- Preparation activities.
- Training plan.
- Timeline for implementation.

It's important to create excitement with the new features and benefits, but don't set unrealistic expectations or over-promise. That will just result in future disappointments. Be enthusiastic and honest in your communications.

Another important task in this meeting is to make sure that your staff is clear about what you expect from them. If eight hours of training prior to live day is required, communicate that right away. Let your staff know that you need their commitment to learn new procedures and adjust their current work habits.

Finally, don't forget to include non-pharmacy employees in your kick-off meeting. While they may not be directly affected by the tech-

nology, they interface with your patients and may need to respond to patients' questions. Prepare them with a couple of key patient benefits that they can communicate to inquiring customers.

Organize a Field Trip

Another good technique to prepare your staff for new technology is to have them visit a pharmacy where the system is fully operational. Ask your vendor if there is a pharmacy in the area that can be visited. It is always helpful to see the end result in action. Live observations will assist you and your staff in envisioning how the technology fits into your practice site.

Training, Training, Training

Training prior to live day is key. It is essential that everyone affected by the new technology is adequately trained. Granted, training sometimes can be boring. You must take steps to ensure everyone has been trained and that they have retained the key training points. Incorporate some simple questions into your conversations with your staff to determine how their learning is progressing. This will help you identify possible training points that need to be reviewed for better understanding. If you are using an electronic training solution, monitor training reports for each associate for completion of the modules.

During the training period, identify a key associate to co-champion the project with you. Perhaps this is someone who is the most enthusiastic and has demonstrated the most competence. Consider providing additional training to this associate so that he or she can be your expert backup when you're not there or when you are not readily available for problem solving or coaching due to business activities.

Practice, Practice, Practice

If the technology can be prac-

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ticed before live day, schedule time for your staff to use it in the practice mode. The more times they can use it in a hands-on mode, the more comfortable they will feel upon implementation. Repetition of new keystrokes or procedures will increase speed of use. Muscle memory is important. Create practice exercises for them and ask them to demonstrate various scenarios. Keep in mind that sometimes practice is best when your associate is free from business interruptions; so you may need to make schedule adjustments to facilitate the practice time.

Countdown to Go Live

At least two weeks prior to live day, plan and/or confirm the activities for go-live week. These include:

- Scheduling extra staff and/or increasing staff overlap periods.
- Confirming the vendor's trainer's schedule, if applicable.
- Confirming the vendor's support accessibility via phone.
- Confirming receipt of job aids and other printed reference guides.
- Conducting another staff meeting to ensure that everyone has the most current information and that all concerns can be discussed.

Once the technology goes live, it is extremely important for you to be generous with your support and acknowledgement of your staff's adaptation to the new technology and procedures. They will be looking to you to help them move through the change cycle. At times you will be the teacher, coach, problem solver, and cheer-

leader. Expression of appreciation and recognition of use of proper procedures are key during stressful periods of change.

Remaining Watchful

Getting new technology installed and your staff trained is a big achievement, but your attention can't wander once you've accomplished all of this. Particularly during the early weeks, be on alert for new bad habits or work-arounds. Sometimes an individual will find what appears to be a better way to accomplish a task, not realizing that shortcuts create other issues that may not be immediately visible. If the technology has reports to monitor processes, review them regularly to ensure compliance with proper procedures. Remember, the technology may not produce its intended results if proper operational protocols are not followed.

A Team Effort

Enhancing your pharmacy practice with new technology can be very exciting. It certainly requires the commitment of the entire pharmacy team. While change is difficult, properly preparing your staff for the change by providing good communications, training, and support are key to a successful implementation. **CT**



Deborah Simmons, R.Ph., is a pharmacy management professional with over 10 years of experience in the chain drug industry, working with pharmacy operations and IT

teams in the development and implementation of pharmacy technology. She can be reached at dsimmons731@msn.com.