INTRODUCTION

Standardizing technologies and processes can go a long way toward providing the best, most efficient patient care. But when it comes to clinically driven decisions such as which ECG devices to support across your care settings, standardization may not always be the answer.

Garrison Gomez, executive director of vital signs and cardiology solutions at Hillrom, has spent his career in hospital and clinic settings, advising healthcare teams on the right technology solutions for each use case. Here, he shares several factors to consider when evaluating what's right for each part of your organization.

HOW DOES STANDARDIZATION HELP?

"Standardization works best—and is most easily accepted by users—when it's a means to an end, not the end itself," says Gomez. "It comes down to what's best for your patients, and that is often supported by what keeps your clinics running smoothly."

Consider these scenarios:

- Common workflows for sending data from the device to the EMR or ECG management system can make life simpler for IT and clinicians alike. With only one interface to build, manage and support across care settings, the benefit is clear: standard work is efficient work.

- Similar user interfaces can make life easier across teams as well. For clinicians, that can mean reduced training needs. For IT and biomeds, they can mean fewer support calls--and an easier time responding to those they do receive, thanks to fewer variables between care settings.

- Partnering with one vendor can simplify processes when it comes to support and parts, as well. Purchasing can go through one vendor. Common replacement parts can be kept on hand more easily. And when support or repairs are needed, there's only one vendor to work with.

With the right partner, standardization makes a lot of sense. But there are other considerations.

WHEN IS IT NOT THE BEST PATH?

Standardizing across your enterprise requires devices that can support the varying needs of different care settings. If your ECG manufacturer mainly focuses on hospitals, standardization may not yield the desired result in your clinics.

"In some cases, trying to force-fit a hospital-oriented device into a clinic can create more problems than standardization solves," says Gomez. "Hospital devices are often designed for higher-acuity settings, making them over-featured for clinics. If the device requires too many clicks, or is full of prompts not necessary in

outpatient settings, you could be opening yourself up to a slew of support calls—or worse, user workarounds and outright refusal."

Put another way: standardization shouldn't be the standard if it's not the best solution for your clinics.

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— Garrison Gomez, Executive Director of Vital Signs and Cardiology Solutions, Hillrom

WHAT ABOUT MAINTAINING ECG DATA?

Another reason enterprises consider standardization: to store and view ECGs in the same health IT system across one network. There are ways to do this, however, without dictating the ECG devices used. Hillrom devices, for example, offer a flexible connectivity platform that supports sending ECG data to a variety of systems, including multiple EMRs, ECG management systems and PACS. Not all manufacturers have experience with—or can support—this level of connectivity if they still use proprietary device communication methods.

"With all of these complexities, determining the best approach to managing ECG data comes down to understanding the clinical use case," says Gomez. "Are your primary care clinics doing full interpretation at the clinic? Just enough to determine if a referral should be made? Or are they only acquiring the ECG for review by a cardiologist? Where, when and how data sharing occurs should strongly influence your decisions."

Consider a few more scenarios:

- If clinics do full ECG interpretation in house, sending data to the EMR may suffice.

- If clinics typically refer out to specialists when any sort of abnormality is found, then sending all data to a central ECG management system may be beneficial.

- Likewise, if the protocol is to have all clinic-acquired ECGs sent for review by a cardiologist, consider an ECG management system.

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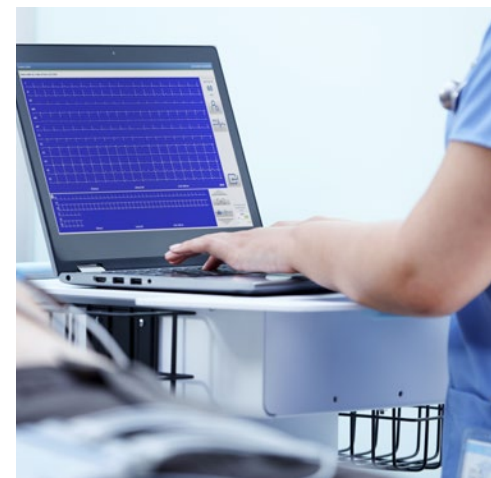
CONCLUSION

When making decisions about ECG devices and connectivity models, the ramifications go well beyond IT concerns. Above all, make sure you understand the clinical use case for each of your care settings. Standardization should support clinical best practice— not vice versa. Ask your device manufacturer about ways to make ECG connectivity work across your enterprise without sacrificing clinical needs.

At Hillrom, we understand the pressures you face as care environments become increasingly interconnected. That's why we provide smarter tools like the Welch Allyn® Connex® Cardio ECG. You can launch the application directly from your EMR to capture and save an ECG in as few as two clicks. And you can standardize connectivity across your IDN with DICOM® or HL7® communication. With flexible connectivity platforms and collaborative support, Hillrom can help you make the most of connected care—for your patients and your clinicians.

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