

LMS

in Health Care

By Jeffrey Walter



Learning management systems can help health care organizations deliver and manage training and certification more efficiently.

Healthcare professionals must be highly-trained and certified to deliver the high quality of care required in an industry that deals with the complexities of the human body. Furthermore, heavy regulation in the industry requires additional training to comply with state and federal regulations and to ensure that all levels of personnel understand operational procedures. However, ensuring that all professionals at a healthcare facility are adequately trained is no easy task. Learning management systems (LMS) can help healthcare organizations efficiently deliver and manage training and certification.

Training challenges

The universe of medical training that must be managed is enormous and encompasses a wide range of learning requirements. From the American Board of Emergency Medicine (ABEM) to the American Nurses Credentialing Center (ANCC), there are hundreds of specialty healthcare organizations that provide certification and continuing education services to a variety of professionals. Certifications exist for acute care practitioners, emergency room physicians, nurses, first responders, mental health and environmental health professionals. And office workers can obtain certification in medical terminology.

Healthcare organizations must manage training across care settings and facilities. Training management may involve several different internal groups, including human resources, IT and clinical operations. Coordinating this disparate set of resources increases administrative effort, time and cost.

Regulatory reporting requirements can be time-consuming and expensive. Regulations such as the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) require healthcare organizations to quickly deliver, monitor and report on mandated training. If a health care or-

ganization fails to meet compliance guidelines it faces negative consequences, including monetary penalties, higher insurance premiums and bad press coverage resulting in lost credibility.

Training and certifications must be delivered in a way that doesn't disrupt day-to-day operations. Operational disruptions can occur when large numbers of staff are pulled off duty to attend on- or off-site training and seminars. The scheduling effort required to minimize these disruptions incurs its own cost in increased administrative overhead. Instructors, off-site facilities, course development and hiring third-party training firms all increase costs.

Through automation, consolidation, and simplification, a learning management system (LMS) can help manage these challenges.

What does an LMS do?

A basic LMS cost-effectively tracks staff skill sets and all modes of training, including seminars, on-site training and online education courses, while housing all information in a central location. For organizations in heavily-regulated industries such as healthcare, the LMS should also manage certifications.

LMS administrators can build course catalogs, schedule course offerings, assign courses and manage many aspects of training delivery, including instructors, documents, facilities, equipment and available online courses. Administrators can also create or approve training paths and programs that determine what courses are required to fulfill a certification, or what training different employees must have completed so the organization complies with a particular regulation.

LMS users can view the course catalog, enroll/cancel course offerings, view their current schedules and transcripts, and launch e-learning modules.

In building the course catalog, the administrator can define prerequisites for courses and certifications. An LMS with strong certification functionality will provide both staff and the organization with the means to easily track requirements for different certifications, when they must be renewed, and progress in attaining new or renewed certification.

Another key function of an LMS is the ability to launch e-learning courses, which can range from simple online slide presentations to complex multimedia simulations that incorporate video, audio, online testing and other interac-

tivity. By following the e learning SCORM standard, an online course can be developed independent of a specific LMS platform. A SCORM-compliant LMS can launch any course that is also SCORM-compliant.

E-learning modules are available in a wide range of topics. Some vendors even specialize in healthcare topics. For example, off-the-shelf courses cover HIPAA, accreditation, medical records, corporate compliance, coding compliance, credentialing, long-term care, facility/patient safety and healthcare administration. Custom courses can be created for job specific procedures to meet HIPAA, OSHA and other regulatory requirements or other facility-specific workflows.

The LMS can schedule courses and define learning paths and certifications using resources from internal and external sources.

Centralizing the learning environment

Many challenges result from health care's distributed nature. Not only are certifications and continuing education dispersed across national specialty boards, state level boards and other third party organizations, but many organizations deliver healthcare through a distributed channel. A health system may have multiple hospitals and urgent care centers in a region. For these organizations, either training personnel must travel to multiple locations to deliver training or field personnel must travel to training locations.

To help manage dispersed learning on the supplier-side, many of the third-party training organizations may have their own LMS that individual users can use to monitor their training. A healthcare organization may even be able to manage training programs through the third-party LMS. However, this situation may leave an organization with many different portals. While the organization benefits from online catalogs and e-learning, management is still dispersed through multiple portals, each requiring their own log-on and look-and-feel.

More sophisticated LMSs can schedule courses and define learning paths and certifications using resources from internal and external

sources. If the facility owns such an LMS, it can manage learning from different credentialing and training organizations by creating a consolidated, common platform to review all staff certifications. The initial consolidation and continuing maintenance of this training information may still be a manual process when multiple LMSs lack information sharing capabilities. A healthcare organization that makes the necessary information technology investments and is able to work with receptive training suppliers can leverage more value from their LMS by automating information sharing.

Note, too, that delivering training is only half the battle. The company must also be able to prove compliance by providing an audit trail. By

integrating with data feeds from other systems, an LMS's audit trail functionality can generate reports on what training individuals have completed, greatly simplifying regulatory reporting requirements.

Individualized learning

In a workforce as functionally diverse and specialized as healthcare, learning requirements vary according to job roles—one size does not fit all. For example, a lab technician does not need the same training as a surgeon's assistant. When multiple internal operational groups and third-party training vendors also become part of the training delivery and tracking process, managing resources becomes more complex. An LMS can simplify the management of numerous, interrelated players in training delivery by mapping feature sets to specific roles and automating the workflow that connects the roles.

A well-designed LMS can handle this challenge by providing flexibility in defining the structure of your organization, the roles of people within it and the training they must complete to meet job-role training requirements. This type of more sophisticated LMS can also use interest lists, job function, location, data feeds from other systems and other factors to determine when and what types of training are

needed and automatically enroll the employee in relevant courses.

Depending on the LMS, staff and/or managers can add course offerings to an interest list, which then sets unique learning objectives for each person according to their professional needs. This type of arrangement saves time for both the training program administrators and the staff. If desired, administrators can set interest lists once on a routine basis (quarterly, annually, etc.) and let the LMS take over through auto-enrollment. The learner's burden is also reduced, since they no longer need to determine their learning needs, locate the appropriate courses offerings and then enroll in the class.

The real-time capability of an LMS to deliver e-learning online smoothes the interruption

of healthcare delivery by customizing training schedules on an individual basis instead of batches. An individual can access a course through a Web browser at any time, from any location that has Internet access.

By pushing a wide range of healthcare courses to all staff in relation to their job roles and learning needs, and consolidating the management of that training, the LMS eliminates the need to compartmentalize training programs in various company divisions. By rendering these "functional silos" obsolete, the LMS dramatically reduces administrative effort and ensures more consistent results. This model also helps professional staff secure hours for licensure or certification. And it provides continuing education in clinical competencies to enhance em-

ployee skills.

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