THE CLINICAL COLLABORATION BUYER'S GUIDE FOR EXECUTIVES

11 Must-Ask Questions When Evaluating Clinical Collaboration Platforms

tigerconnect

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INTRODUCTION

As a Healthcare executive, you already know the industry is undergoing a dramatic shift. With payers systematically pushing the industry toward value-based care, hospitals and other care organizations must find new ways to control costs and remain profitable.

One way is through an advanced, integrated clinical collaboration platform, which can dramatically curb costs and streamline throughput. Not surprisingly, day-to-day procedures can be riddled with inefficiencies caused by a lack of clear communication between clinical providers and support staff. By leveraging the latest technology, integrating with existing systems, and reimagining workflows through the lens of communication optimization, organizations can reduce or eliminate unnecessary steps and potentially save millions of dollars in the process.

To help you navigate a path to communication efficiency, we've created a list of the eleven most important questions every executive should ask when evaluating a clinical collaboration platform.

> **❝ *A 500-bed hospital loses over $4 million annually as a result of communication inefficiencies.* ❞**
>
> —*Journal of Healthcare Management*

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Can the vendor provide documented ROI examples of how their solution has improved workflow communications and reduced hospital costs? Are the cost savings significant?

While it's every vendor's job to sell potential customers on the value of their service, nothing speaks louder than a satisfied customer. Certainly, most solutions deliver some measure of value, but can that value be quantified against key metrics such as reduction in bed days, improved reimbursements, and HCAHPS scores?

A serious vendor with a respectable track record and a commitment to the clinical space should have no problem producing a number of ROI-centric case studies that outline in detail how the customer significantly improved operations using their solution. To affirm these claims, ask to speak with the customer directly. Most healthcare organizations are sympathetic to the complex task of selecting a vendor and will gladly provide a reference if you contact them.
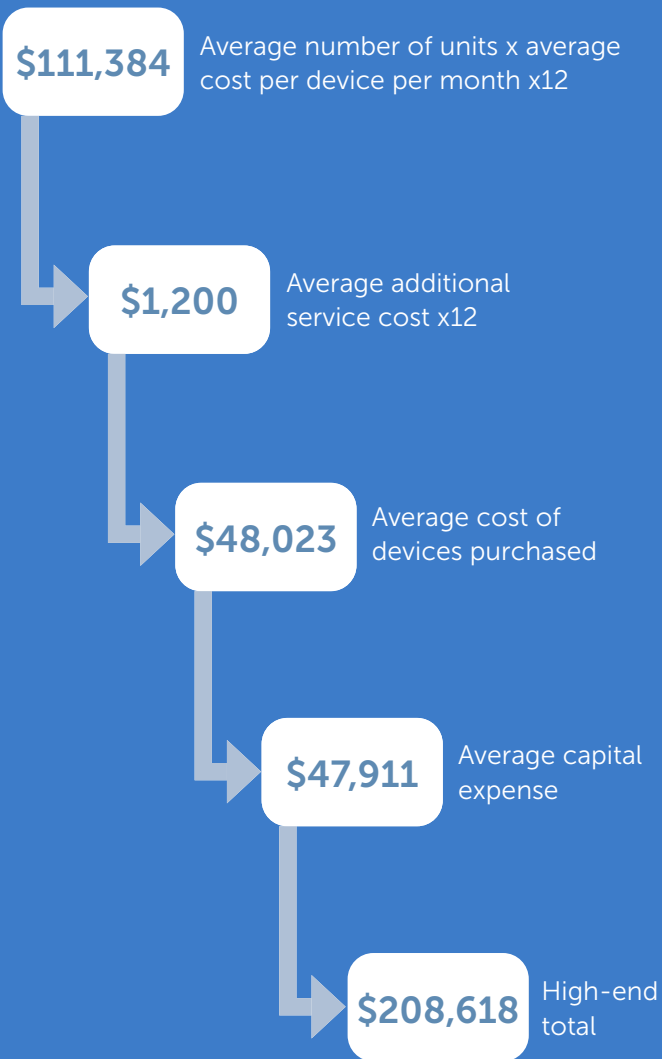
Can the solution support custom integrations with your hospital's EHR? If so, how extensively?

A Significant Diffrence exists between comprehensive clinical collaboration platforms and the more basic secure messaging applications. the former offers a robust, integrated experience that funnels real-time messages and alerts from a range of systems like the EHR and centralizes them on a single platform that's accessible via smartphone, tablet or desktop. Basic secure messaging typically lacks the integration capabilities of its more sophisticated clinical collaboration counterpart and remains limited to a compliant form of 1-to-1 or group text messaging.

A sophisticated solution should integrate with the EHR in a multitude of ways starting with real-time, alert-based messages that can be redirected to a physician or nurse's smartphone. A more advanced integration could surface patient information within the messaging app through purpose-built screens that allow selective updates to the patient record, saving steps and reducing medical errors.
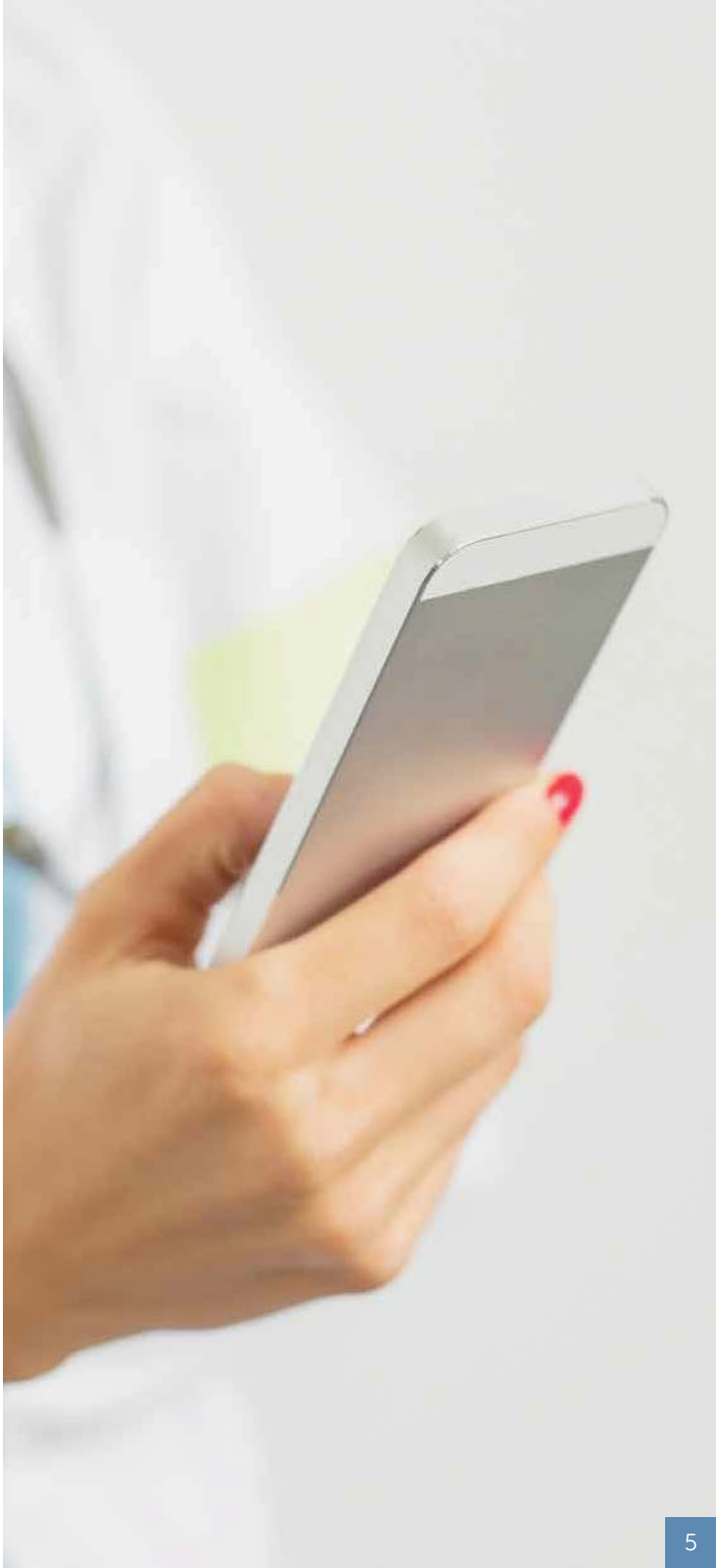
TOTAL COST OF PAGER OWNERSHIP

$111,384 Average number of units x average cost per device per month x12

$1,200 Average additional service cost x12

$48,023 Average cost of devices purchased

$47,911 Average capital expense

$208,618 High-end total

HIMSS Analysis 2015 study

Does the solution integrate with other hospital systems like nurse call, scheduling, call center, and paging systems?

While integrating your clinical communications solution with the EHR can be critically important, other integrations can deliver high value as well.

NURSE CALL

Naturally, configuring your nurse call system to receive smartphone alerts and other information will reduce alert fatigue, allowing nurses to receive targeted messaging that lets them manage those patient needs that are most urgent. It can also improve response times, untether nurses from the computer terminal and ease dependency on the unit clerk.

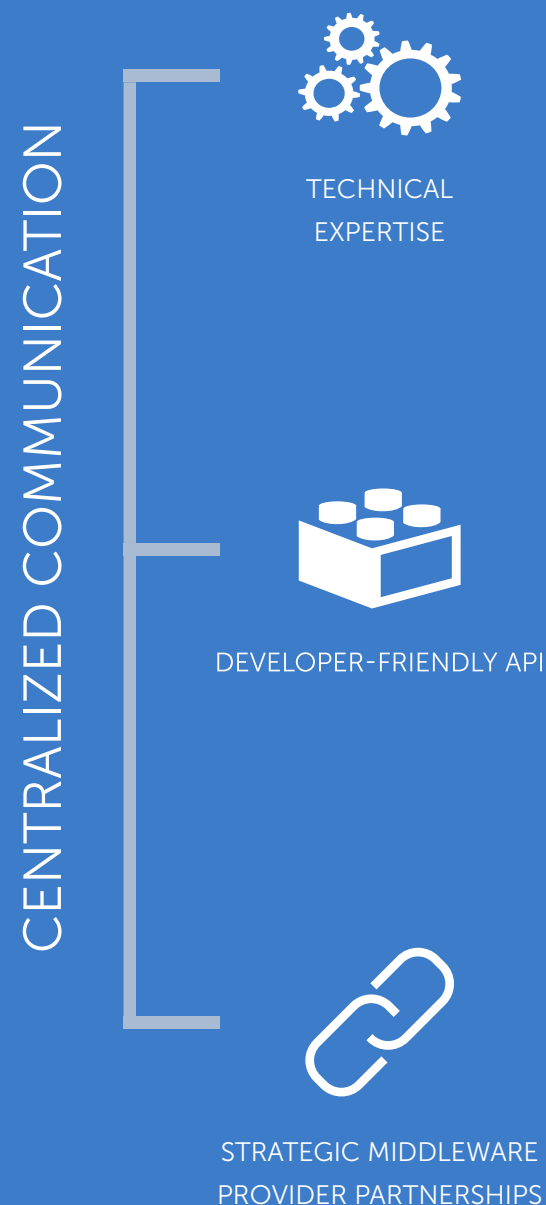### SCHEDULING

Being able to find and access on-call colleagues instantly from inside the messaging application can significantly improve communications and help expedite clinical care across teams by making the right specialists and others quickly identifiable and easy to reach. No more spreadsheets or whiteboard schedules since staff members will be using a single system that's smartphone-enabled.
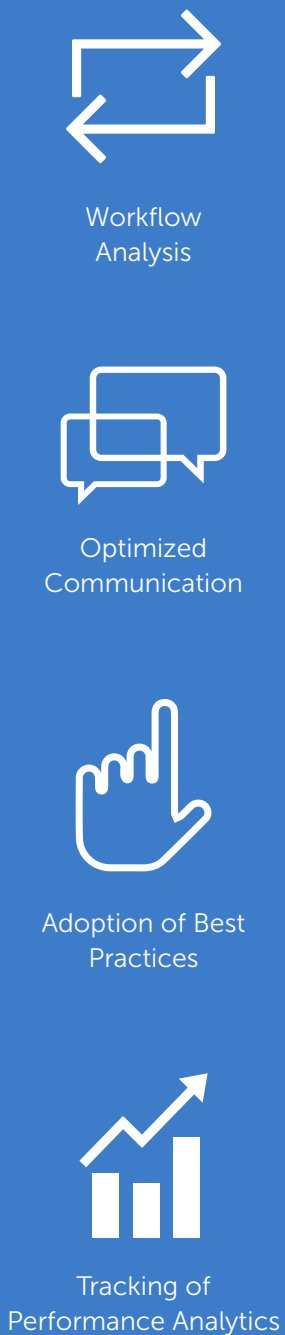
How robust are the vendor's integration capabilities? Does the vendor have the skilled teams and appropriate strategic partnerships in place to enable the integrations you need?

There's a convergence under way in healthcare that involves centralizing alerts and patient information housed across multiple systems, aggregating them onto a single clinical collaboration platform. While this convergence shows enormous promise for advancing healthcare, the realities of integrating information drawn from different systems and a multitude of vendors can be complex and capital-intensive.

Tackling these integrations requires deep technical expertise, a developer-friendly API, and strategic middleware capabilities. Ensuring your clinical collaboration vendor has the aptitude and resources in such key areas will improve your odds of a successful implementation and future-proof your organization for the coming wave of centralized communication.

CENTRALIZED COMMUNICATION

TECHNICAL EXPERTISE

DEVELOPER-FRIENDLY API

STRATEGIC MIDDLEWARE PROVIDER PARTNERSHIPS

ONGOING EDUCATION AND MONITORING

Workflow
Analysis

Optimized
Communication

Adoption of Best
Practices

Tracking of
Performance Analytics

What types of training and support are offered to ensure your employees are properly on-boarded and the hospital is getting value from the solution? What happens if there's a support issue?

No matter how elegantly designed or intuitive a collaboration solution is, some level of end user training is required to ensure a successful adoption rate. Employees' grasp of technology varies widely across an organization so it's important that your vendor provides sufficient training and support – either onsite or virtually – for both on-boarding and product education.

Issues will naturally come up, and a reputable vendor won't disappear once the onboarding phase is complete, but should continue their commitment to your success by providing support in the form of ongoing education and monitoring. These include developing in-depth analyses of existing workflows and designing programs that optimize communications between departments and staff along with recommendations for adopting best practices and tracking performance analytics.

Once the solution has been implemented, what types of ongoing support does the vendor provide to ensure you have a successful outcome?

Implementing a clinical collaboration solution is just the beginning. Since the majority of employees will be required to communicate on a single platform, it's important that staff receive proper training and end-user support to achieve a meaningful level of internal adoption.

A vendor with a strong services component will provide multiple levels of support, beginning with the implementation phase, where a team of specialists will work with your IT department to ensure proper setup of the system and any integrations. The team should train your organization through onsite sessions, webinars, how-to videos, FAQs, and other resources highlighting application functionality.

The second phase should provide ongoing education and best-practice support around specific workflows. This starts by examining your most common processes and pinpointing inefficiencies. Once identified, best practices gleaned from the industry's top organizations should be applied and leveraged to raise performance.

Finally, no matter how good the solution, users and administrators will always have questions or need help with a particular issue. Knowing there's an expert support team there to help you whenever you need it provides peace of mind and minimizes interruptions to productivity. Confirm beforehand the level of support the vendor is contractually obligated to provide, which roles at your organization are entitled to receive that support (admins, end users, etc.), and finally, the escalation path in the event you encounter a major support issue.
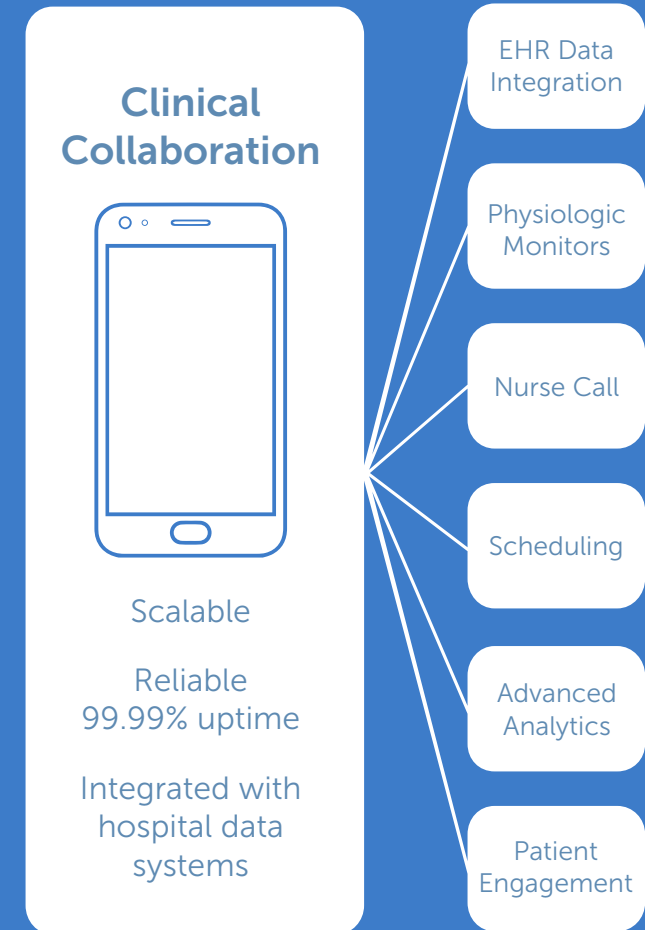
How does the vendor ensure meaningful adoption and engagement with the solution?

No hospital can afford to invest in shelfware, and since higher adoption has been proven to boost productivity, reduce costs, and improve patient satisfaction, it's a crucial area to focus on.

High adoption starts with a well-designed, easy-to-use product, beginning with the on-boarding process. A clunky or confusing first-time login will negatively impact adoption out of the gate as will a cluttered or poorly organized user interface. A clean, user-friendly design will ensure users embrace the solution and incorporate it into their daily routines, helping achieve meaningful ROI for the organization.

And just as the user interface needs to be functional and friendly, so should the administration console. Admins should have the ability to quickly on-board large numbers of users, set or update security policies, and maintain full control over the users on the system. LDAP and Active Directory, Single Sign-On, and SAML support as well as customizable welcome emails and preset training materials will help ensure users get up and running without any issues.

Clinical Collaboration

Scalable

Reliable
99.99% uptime

Integrated with hospital data systems

EHR Data Integration

Physiologic Monitors

Nurse Call

Scheduling

Advanced Analytics

Patient Engagement

What types of usage data and reporting does the solution track? Does the vendor provide access to analytics and insights to help benchmark your performance against other hospitals?

Common types of data that your clinical collaboration solution should track include usage trends by organization, department, and individuals as well as transactional data. For reporting, the solution should capture real-time data around specific activities, including bedside requests and nurse response times, time spent with patients, the detection of high-acuity patients, and correlations to patient satisfaction scores. Collectively, these data types will provide a window into your organization's effectiveness in communicating.

While having access to data is important, without benchmarks to compare against, you won't know if you're lagging or ahead of the pack. Your vendor should track and aggregate usage data across their customer base to provide comparative benchmarks that you can use to see how your departments and organization stack up industry-wise. This data can be used to identify problem areas and share strategies for raising adoption by retraining teams on underutilized features or implementing certain types of integrations.

How reliable is the platform? Does it have a sustained record of 99.99% uptime or greater?

It goes without saying that reliability and service uptime should be among the very top priorities when evaluating a clinical collaboration platform, and yet, this seemingly obvious question can sometimes go unchecked in the diligence process. Given the mission-critical nature of healthcare, the potential impact of a communications service outage on patient outcomes means that anything less than four 9's in uptime reliability is cause for concern. Healthcare buyers should demand vendor transparency, ensuring they provide verifiable data that supports their uptime claim and 24/7 access to a real-time web reporting page indicating any service interruptions.

Ensure
HIPPA-Compliance

Identify 3rd Party
Certifications

$

Assure Vendor
Will Assume
Violation Fines

Is the solution encrypted and secure?
If so, what security certifications has the solution earned from an accredited third party?

With HIPAA-related fines increasing in both cost and frequency, your clinical communications provider shouldn't expose you to further risk. While most secure messaging vendors list HIPAA-compliance in their marketing materials, barring an independent review, this self-anointed claim remains just a claim, with no easy means of verification since the Joint Commission is not an enforcement agency. Instead, they rely on the vendors themselves to self-adhere to the guidelines.

Identifying vendors with valid 3rd-party security certifications such as HITRUST can help mitigate organizational risk in the event the vendor has a security flaw. Another best practice is to secure assurance from the vendor that they will assume the fines in the event their product results in a HIPAA violation for your organization.

Is the vendor solely focused on secure messaging or is it just an add-on to another line of business or product?

Building a reliable, scalable, clinical collaboration platform is a complicated endeavor. Several companies who have entered the space over the past few years (® including some EHRs ®) have done so with products that serve as an adjunct to existing offerings that were historically the company's bread-and-butter. The challenge with this approach is that the messaging product will nearly always play second fiddle to their core business. That means fewer resources – engineers, infrastructure, support, etc. – go to the development and advancement of the communications solution, leaving you with a second-rate product and a subpar customer experience.

Limit your shortlist to vendors who are solely focused on the clinical communications space. This will ensure you get a product that is evolving in lockstep with the industry and can support and address your needs in a way that assures a high likelihood of success.

AVOID A SECOND RATE PRODUCT, LIMIT YOUR SHORTLIST TO VENDORS WHO ARE SOLELY FOCUSED ON THE CLINICAL COLLABORATION SPACE.

CONCLUSION

With healthcare organizations facing chronic financial challenges, aggressively managing your bottom line is becoming critically important. Few areas in healthcare today offer such an immediate and substantial return on investment as an integrated, well-supported, data-driven clinical collaboration platform. As you set about evaluating vendors, here are some important points to keep in mind:

- Clinical collaborations is a complex field. Be sure your vendor is solely focused on a fully integrated approach and that they're willing and able to invest in development of the product for the long haul.

- Reliability, uptime, and scale are critical to your team's effectiveness. Insist that vendors provide a verifiable record of uptime and service outages as well as their ability to scale in terms of users and message volume.

- Confirm what type of support the vendor is contractually willing to provide. These should include implementation, end user training, workflow optimization and best practices, 24/7 customer support, and performance benchmarking.

At the end of the day, finding the right solution can be a straightforward exercise. By using these important criteria to identify a vendor's strengths and weaknesses, you will have the information and confidence you need to make an informed decision about the right solution for your organization.
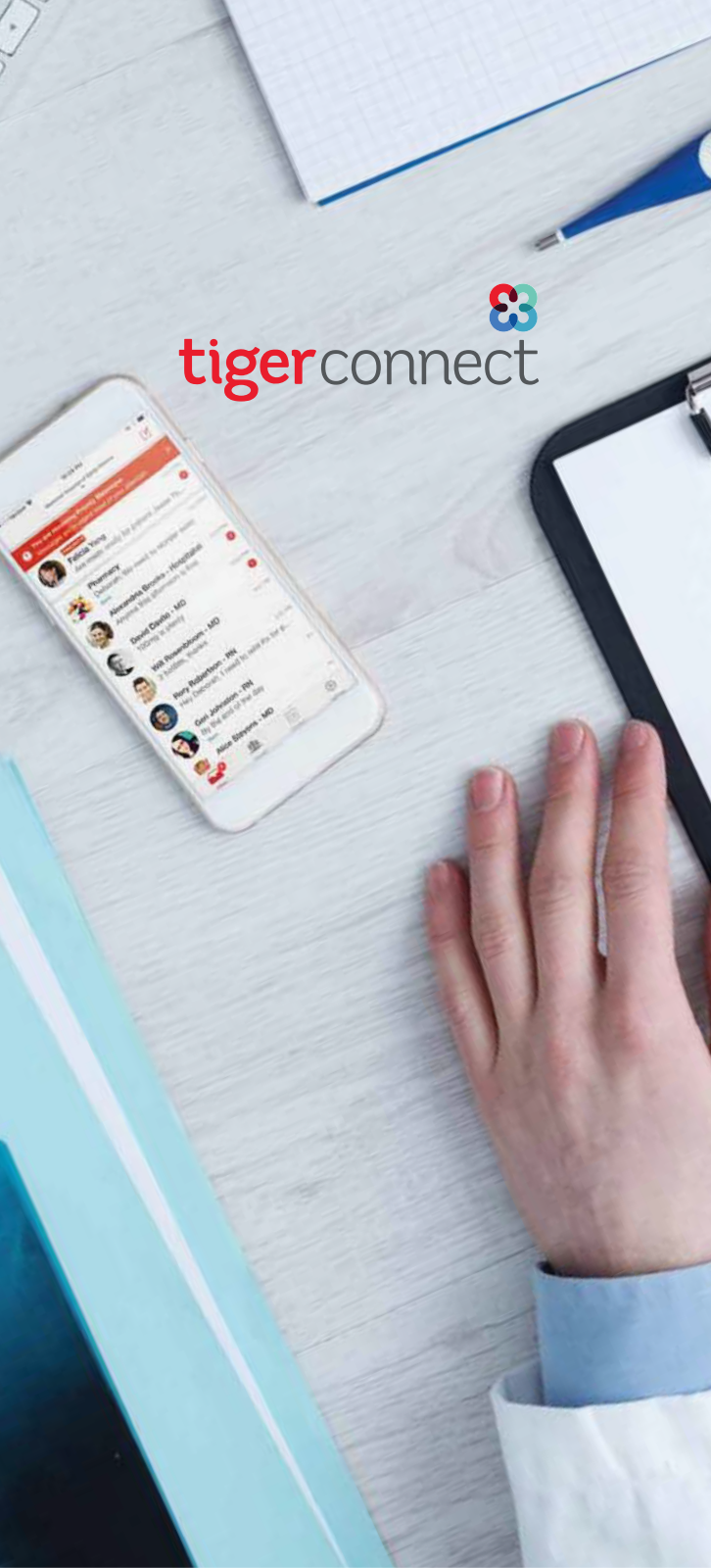
About TigerConnect

As healthcare's largest provider of clinical communication solutions, TigerConnect helps physicians, nurses, and other staff communicate and collaborate more effectively, accelerating productivity, reducing costs, and improving patient outcomes. With 7,000 facilities, 99.99% uptime, and over 10 million messages processed each day, TigerConnect continually delivers advanced product innovations and integrates with critical hospital systems such as the EHR, nurse call, and scheduling solutions.

The company's commitment to client success is reflected in its broad support organization that works directly with clients at every stage to streamline communication workflows and achieve the highest possible ROI.

Learn how clients like RWJBarnabas, Geisinger, and LifePoint are using TigerConnect to solve healthcare's biggest communication challenges.

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