

An Investment in Growth Leads to Results and Performance Leadership for Caritas Home Care

To achieve its bold vision of growth, Caritas management believed that technology was essential to providing operational efficiencies, timely management reporting, and communication capabilities in order to execute the plan. Enter HealthWyse – their chosen technology partner to help Caritas achieve its goals.

Background

The year was 2001 and Caritas Home Care, formerly Neponset Valley Nursing Association, had just merged with St. Elizabeth's Home Care as part of Caritas Christi Health Care's (CCHC) vision for meeting the system's continuum of care needs. This health care system, the 2nd largest in New England, with its commitment to clinical excellence and breadth of services encompasses not only six hospitals, but hospice care, home care and a homeless shelter. Caritas Home Care had provided exemplary care over the years and was now given the challenge of developing new programs that could be integrated within the system and would significantly contribute to overall growth. The opportunities ahead seemed exciting, as long as the tools were in place to be successful. As Maureen Kennedy Thompson, Executive Director of the Agency, said, "We knew we needed better technology to get us to the future."

Ms. Thompson assembled a team to identify shortcomings of the existing technology system. Their findings: The older system was not compliant with HIPAA; there were significant delays in processing claims; overtime was required to keep up with the paperwork; management was lacking key reports that would highlight problem areas and help steer growth; and there was no shared access to clinical information or point of care devices.

The new system would need to handle 140,000 home visits per year, and 350 staff along with parallel goals of growth and clinical innovation. As Brian McNeil, Director of Finance, said, "Our goal is not just growth but visits that will significantly improve health status. A big piece of that was selecting a system that would have clinical information available – literally in the palm of your hand."

After performing a thorough evaluation of home care technology vendors, HealthWyse was selected as the technology partner of choice to help Caritas achieve its vision. Anne Dosch, who led the selection process, recalled the factors favoring HealthWyse: "HealthWyse

was built for the PPS (prospective pay reimbursement) system. Even more important to the team, HealthWyse made a commitment to tailor its system to meet our needs." "Tailoring" meant incorporating CHC's new initiatives such as heart failure, into the HealthWyse network. HealthWyse has committed to working with CHC on diabetes and wound care management. Another key factor in the selection of HealthWyse was their reputation for support. Says, Ms. Dosch, "We asked around to see if they were as good as their reputation, and they were. As with any computer system, problems and issues inevitably arise. I have found that when I call, they listen and help to find a solution."

Implementation Results

Just over one year into the HealthWyse implementation, results are apparent as the system has touched every department – and in a very positive way. The Billing Department has found their work revolutionized since HealthWyse came on board. "Our jobs changed from bill preparation to following up for payment because the system does so much of the work for us," said Kathleen Blankenship, Billing Supervisor. A batch of claims that previously took 6 days to process, now takes one hour because of the automated review processes. The financial impact has been huge: Receivables are down from 90 days to 30 days, and cash flow is vastly improved.

The Intake department, which manages referrals for CHC, has also felt the impact of HealthWyse. Patient information can much more readily be shared with hospital liaisons. Jane Mulligan, the Admissions Supervisor, comments, "Before HealthWyse, overtime was a constant and the information never went anywhere". This year, with 20% growth in referrals, the Intake department was able to keep up with the workload without needing overtime or new hires.

Likewise the department that schedules home visits found their jobs easier because they can readily give clinicians information, at a moment's notice. Ann Pircio,

HCA Scheduler, gives this example of how HealthWyse has made a difference:

“When Home Care Aides make a scheduled visit and no one answers, we need to immediately contact next of kin to relay the information. Finding

“We believe computers are the future—as a management tool, as a means to standardize care, and as a way to make care delivery as easy as possible.” next of kin used to be time-consuming, but now is easily identified within the system.”

What is the impact of HealthWyse on the Medical Records department where the work load was carried by three employees doing manual review and filing? After their initial anxiety about potential job loss, medical record personnel have become strong advocates for the system as their skills have been enhanced, and their jobs redefined. Karen Gorman, Medical Records Supervisor, has seen to it that, “Three of my file clerks are trained on the computer. Now along with filing, they are using the computer to review discharge documentation, OASIS, or run reports that help us troubleshoot. It has been a very positive experience.” Four data entry staff have expanded their roles with the HealthWyse System.

Anne Dosch, who led the implementation process and interfaces with HealthWyse on behalf of CHC, also performs Performance Improvement. While she has become an expert at reading “chicken scrawl”, she doesn’t need to anymore: “I don’t have to read handwritten notes, and best of all, I can review the chart from my computer rather than having to go find it.” Easy access, cleaner records, legibility and automated system checks have all meant more time for departments to take on new projects, such as OBQI (Outcome Based Quality Improvement) and further help Caritas achieve its vision of growth and clinical innovation.

Clinicians’ Experience

Of course just because internal operations transitioned to a new system relatively quickly would not necessarily mean that time-crunched clinicians would follow. Ms. Thompson and Ms. Dosch were well aware of pockets of resistance among the 200 clinicians and worked hard to make sure their voices were heard. “After all, our nurses and therapists had to deal with sicker patients, and new technology, at a time when we were growing,” commented Anne Dosch. Still, they were surprised at how easily clinicians learned the system, especially given that some of the nurses and therapists weren’t computer savvy and had never even used email.

Nurse Pat Fitzpatrick is a case in point. While she has a computer at home, it is her kids and husband who use it. She was not interested in learning new technology

and was apprehensive that HealthWyse would mean more demands on her already long day and less time with patients. Instead, she has found herself pleasantly surprised. Because of information access she does not need to travel to the office nearly so often, saving her valuable time. Also, the system was not that hard to learn. “Once you learn the system, it becomes second nature.

It is intuitive – like riding a bike,” says Fitzpatrick. Besides reduced travel time, the big benefit for Fitzpatrick is that “Information is just there – which clinician admitted the patient, and the referral information. You feel better equipped when you go see the patient.”

Meeting Caritas’ Expectations

Eighteen months later, has HealthWyse met CHC’s expectations – to streamline operations, provide management tools, and enhance communication throughout the organization? With solid double-digit growth and only two new hires – one to manage the new infrastructure and the other to assist Anne Dosch in training --the evidence appears strong that operational efficiency has been achieved. Add to that, more billings as home health nurses and therapists that previously spent 25% of their time in the office doing paperwork can now spend full time in the field with patients. The financial metrics all demonstrate significant improvements.

Management tools to gauge program success and to troubleshoot operations have also begun to make an impact. The Billing department’s use of the Unbilled Services and No Primary Insurance Reports have resulted in “losing very little” in charge capture according to Ms. Blankenship, Billing Supervisor. Home care growth will largely depend upon referrals, which is why the Referral Report has become such a key read for management. “Tools are beginning to make an impact and will only continue as we move forward,” says Ms. Thompson.

“Moving forward” has become a core value inside Caritas Home Care. While some may fear change, management and clinicians alike feel emboldened by the mission and secure that with technology in hand, they will meet the challenges ahead. As Ms. Thompson sees it, “We believe computers are the future – as a management tool, as a means to standardize care, and as a way to make care delivery as easy as possible.”

The Caritas future will include new delivery models that incorporate telemedicine and e learning so that nurses and therapists covering 86 communities won’t need to visit the office. “We don’t know the specifics,” says Ms. Thompson, “but we have charted a path and HealthWyse will play a significant role in helping us to get there.”