

Home Health Care:

Therapists Make Home Visits with MedShare™ for BlackBerry® in Hand

Benefits include more visits per week, improved employee retention, easy scheduling changes, more efficient billing and payroll, GPS and mapping capabilities and secure 2-way real-time communications.

Christine Reno knows both sides of providing home care. A therapist herself, Reno now works on the other side of the coin as Business Director for Therapy Partners, an agency of visiting occupational therapists, physiotherapists, speech therapists, social workers, and nutrition counsellors. Based in Guelph, Ontario, Therapy Partners' care gives visit homes, schools, workplaces, long-term care residences, and other often far-flung facilities. Then there's more work to do on their case load at home -- until now that is. Therapy Partners has equipped its visiting professionals with the MedShare™ for BlackBerry® tool.

"Traditionally, we would go home at night and spend maybe two hours re-entering our notes and other patient information from the day on official office records," explains Reno. "But now, our therapists and counsellors can capture everything on their BlackBerry right at the point of care. And the data comes in wirelessly and directly to our MedShare database which houses the electronic medical records at the office.

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Immediate Improvements

"As a result, our records are more accurate since the data is entered directly and we don't need to tie up an office clerk checking for errors or inputting paper record information that the therapists faxed in. Also, if we change any procedures or policies no one needs to come in and pick up an amended



BlackBerry 8800 running MedShare for BlackBerry

CD. Instead, the changes are pushed directly to their BlackBerry. So everyone knows about the changes instantly."

But there are other returns on investment (ROI) more profound.

"With no other after-hours record keeping to do, the therapist can either keep to their normal eight daily visits and enjoy a better home life -- or add a ninth visit to their day," says Reno. "Since we are all paid per visit, there's a potential financial return there too. Either way, having the MedShare for Blackberry tool in hand every day makes working for Therapy Partners much more appealing. And that's very important these days when it comes to attracting and retaining scarce professional people."

Good for the staff and the business no doubt, but what about the clients? What's the impact on the quality of their care?

Client Benefit

Very beneficial -- says a research report on wireless home care solutions that was commissioned by Research In Motion® (RIM), the developer of the BlackBerry, and prepared by technology market researchers at the Venture Development Corporation (VDC) in Natick, Massachusetts. The report points out that there is "Improved patient care through inter-team communication..."

Deployment of wireless solutions and the adoption of electronic patient records should provide greater access to critical information and foster improved coordination of care among the patients various providers through an entire period of illness”

“... the VDC study points to an ROI of up to 1,000 percent or more in improved administrative efficiencies.”

At Therapy Partners, the MedShare for Blackberry technology is ensuring that the entire care team always has up to the minute electronic views of their clients.

GPS Guided

Therapy Partners has equipped each visiting therapist and counsellor with a BlackBerry 8830™. It carries not only the MedShare application but also global positioning system (GPS) software. Together, they enable the therapists to call up their schedule of patient visits for the day; attach each client's record to that visit; then navigate to the client's home or visit location more efficiently. An optional feature tracks employees, improving their safety by letting the office know there exact location.

Privacy Assured

Back at the office, a BlackBerry Enterprise Server (BES), version 4.2, is quarterbacking all this with the help of a Mobile Data Services (MDS) feature. MDS encrypts all patient data inside the firewall -- ensuring compliance with privacy legislation -- before the information is transmitted out to the BlackBerry 8830s. On the back end, Therapy Partners is relying on MedShare HC software to do its billing, payroll, and updating of electronic medical records. This .Net 2.0 application is underpinned by a service oriented architecture running on a Microsoft SQL Server 2005.

Always On

Providing the wireless link between the Therapy Partners office and its BlackBerry-toting staff is a Telus high speed 1xEVDO data communications network. Should any visit occur out of network coverage, the “Always On” feature in the MedShare software on the BlackBerry 8830s holds any data entered by the therapist until the device comes back into range. When re-connected, the BlackBerry automatically uploads data to the BES server back at the Guelph office. Similarly, the server automatically downloads any new information to the therapist's BlackBerry. All information tightly encrypted both ways, of course.

Superior to Laptops

“This gives our system an advantage even over web-based or terminal service applications running on laptops since they require a constant internet connection,” says MedShare CEO J.Paul Haynes. “Therapy Partners’ therapists don’t have to stop, find a high speed connection to the internet, and then upload. For them, the data transfer takes place on the fly.”

Implementing such a tool as MedShare for BlackBerry does have its challenges, admits Therapy Partners’ Reno, but they are mostly human ones. “Technically, we’ve had tremendous support from MedShare in getting the system implemented. But it is a change and people need time to get used to doing things differently.”

Human Costs Saved

MedShare President, Barry Billings says the benefits of doing things are truly significant: “On the business side of wireless home care, the VDC study points to an ROI of up to 1,000 percent or more in improved administrative efficiencies. On the human side, we know that the price of replacing a skilled healthcare worker can run from \$30,000 to \$100,000 in recruitment, training, and re-location costs.”

Judging how enthusiastically Therapy Partners staff have embraced MedShare for BlackBerry, Reno expects its retention rate of its skilled care givers to be very high.



Christine Reno, Therapy Partners Inc., MedShare for BlackBerry Trailblazer Program