Patient and family engagement technology can deliver ROI in home-based care

Executive Summary

Demand for care in the home is on the rise and will only continue to grow as the U.S. population ages. Home-based care providers encounter unique challenges not faced by those in facility-based care settings—including policy and payment model changes that directly impact efficiency and profitability.

Quality measure performance and an increased focus on patient experiences require more streamlined communication, planning, and documentation of care. This means the need for timely and accurate information is critically important, but outdated communication methods like phone and fax are still the dominant ways post-acute care providers communicate with each other, patients, family members, and their referral sources.

Today's technology can address many of these challenges, which can lead to improved patient outcomes, assistance with disease management, and more engaged patients and family caregivers. For providers, these same technologies can reduce staff burnout and turnover, enhance caregiver autonomy and connectedness, and deliver significant ROI.

This data sheet will present evidence found in clinical research and industry-specific studies that can help home-based care providers better understand why many of their successful peers are adopting modern communication and collaboration platforms.

Demand for care in the home is rising

The demand for home-based care is at an all-time high and is likely to continue to increase in the coming years.[1,2] By 2030, the U.S. Census Bureau estimates that 73 million Americans—or more than one in five—will be aged 65 or older, which is an increase of 17 million individuals from 2020.[3] In 2018 alone, over $18 billion was spent on Medicare for home health.

Payers, including Medicare and private insurers, increasingly have a financial incentive to encourage care in lower-acuity settings, like the home, and patients have made it clear they want to stay at home longer.[4]

Reimbursement mechanisms are evolving

While demand for care in the home is increasing, Medicare and many commercial payers continue to make drastic changes to home health provisions and payments. Following the Patient-Driven Groupings Model (PDGM), which in 2020 changed how home health care providers were reimbursed, Medicare's Home Health Value-based Purchasing (HHVBP) program takes effect nationwide in 2022.[5,6]

Under the HHVBP program, home health organizations are evaluated based on quality measures related to the utilization of inpatient and emergency room services, spending, patient outcomes, and the patient experience (as measured by HHCAHPS).[7]

Communication and coordination can make an impact

Communication is key for coordinating care, but has been cited as one of the main challenges for home health care providers.[8] Methods for sharing information are often lacking,[9] with some providers even using handwritten notes to communicate.[8]

In a recent survey, 60% of home health care nurses said they received insufficient information from hospitals about home health care patients,[10] which put patients at risk or delayed care.

Poor communication between nurses and physicians can be associated with an increased risk of hospital readmission among some patients.

STUDY FINDINGS

A FAILURE BY A HOME HEALTH NURSE TO REACH A PHYSICIAN OR THEIR STAFF RESULTED IN

5-6%+ **INCREASE IN THE PROBABILITY OF READMISSION[11]**

The level of acute care utilization of home health patients impacts business results in two major ways:

1. The percent of patients who use emergency department (ED) or hospital care is evaluated under the HHVBP model[12] and bonuses and penalties based on program performance could be as high as 8% starting in 2022.[13]

2. Significant portions of home health episodes (as many as 33%) occur after a hospitalization or post-acute care stay[14] and hospitals may be more likely to refer patients to home health organizations that have demonstrated low rates of readmission.[14]

The good news is that improved, real-time connections between home-based care providers, patients, and family caregivers can produce observable improvements in care coordination. For example, when a communication protocol was implemented by home health professionals, it produced a response rate from primary care personnel of 82% and resulted in significant improvements in patient metrics of depression and disability, and patients claimed to be satisfied with care.[15]

Patients equate consistent communication and collaboration between the healthcare professionals caring for them as high-quality service.[16] In a recent survey of patients, 95% said communication responsiveness influenced their satisfaction with their home health provider, and 96% said they would choose a provider that uses real-time communication technology and would give them a better HHCAHPS score.[17]

Home-based care has unique communication challenges

Communication in home-based care can be more challenging than in a facility or hospital where the environment is controlled, technology is utilized, and patients can have almost instant access to clinicians. Care staff need to juggle unknowns related to WIFI connectivity, access to technology, patient needs, and other factors.

Overburdened home health nurses may experience burnout, which can increase the likelihood of patient hospitalization,[18] as well as staff turnover. Recent estimates place average home health nurse turnover at over

25% [19]

As an example, there are times when a physician signature is required, but traditional methods of communicating with the physician and obtaining that signature can take significant time and effort from clinical staff. Many physicians dislike portals for completing orders because it requires time to navigate, and physicians need to keep track of their login credentials.

Across all settings, the paperwork required to authorize and deliver care is massive, but in home-based care it can be especially burdensome because the patient or family member is not always present, and the physician is not right down the hall like in a hospital. These unique challenges require innovative solutions that are flexible and adaptable to various needs of patients, caregivers, facilities, and staff.

The right technology can ease communication challenges

Studies have shown that home-based care providers face multiple challenges and sources of frustration related to communication, isolation, and the education and involvement of patients and their families.[8] It's also been suggested that technology can address many of these existing challenges and, as a result, improve the way providers communicate and coordinate, minimize communication errors, and generally increase their ability to do their job.[8]

An example of how providers are addressing these challenges with technology is augmented nursing care in the home. It can improve patient outcomes and help patients manage chronic conditions.[20]

Further, the use of secure, real-time messaging and electronic versions of patient assessment forms have been cited as important tools for home health care.[21] Without this capability, nurses are often forced to copy notes or instructions by hand, introducing the possibility of an error that could result in an unnecessary hospitalization.

Various technologies have been shown to reduce the likelihood of a hospital readmission[22] and improve communication with family caregivers[23]—not just patients. *Technology may also help generally empower patients and family caregivers and promote activation[24] (i.e., feeling equipped with adequate knowledge to be actively engaged in their health and care[25]) across the care spectrum, which can be associated with better care experiences, improved outcomes (better clinical indicators, more healthy behaviors, greater use of preventive care), and lower care costs that extend to years in the future.[26-28]*

Technology that increases communication between staff can also help reduce turnover within home-based care. Studies show that staff who feel connected and autonomous have higher satisfaction and are more likely to be retained.[29] Promoting good relationships with other staff and providing adequate administrative support can improve job satisfaction and retention of home health nurses.[30] Given that many staff complaints relate to communication issues, addressing those issues are likely to increase the chances that staff feel supported.

Ways Improved Communication and Coordination from Technology Can Produce a Positive Return on Investment in Home Health Care	
RESULTS FROM BETTER COMMUNICATION	**HOW THAT TRANSLATES TO DOLLARS**
Lower likelihood of errors, adverse events, or hospitalizations	• Better performance on quality measures that influence reimbursement • Lower likelihood of penalties under HHVBP • More referrals from hospitals
Higher patient satisfaction	• Better performance on HHCAHPS
Increased patient activation	• Lower likelihood of hospitalization or ED utilization • Better patient functioning
Improved staff efficiency	• Lower costs • Higher volume of visits
Higher staff satisfaction	• Less staff turnover

Fortunately, digital solutions exist that can help home-based care organizations and staff improve communication and coordination.

The Citus Health Platform Supports a Comprehensive Communication Strategy Including:

- **SECURE, INSTANT CARE TEAM MESSAGING**
- **AUTO-ROUTING AND ESCALATION PROTOCOLS**
- **SECURE REAL-TIME VIDEO SESSIONS**
- **CUSTOMIZABLE DIGITAL FORMS**
- **APP-LESS E-SIGNATURE CAPTURE**
- **DIGITAL PATIENT SELF-SERVICE EDUCATION**
- **EHR INTEGRATION**

Embracing technology can produce a financial return

The home-based care landscape is expanding and changing. Moving forward, providers will be measured on performance related to patient outcomes, acute care utilization, and patient experiences. Tools that optimize efficiency, reduce the likelihood of human errors, increase patient satisfaction, and make staff more productive will be necessary to be competitive in this space.

Providers that can embrace the business case for technology may see the rewards—better outcomes and lower costs—reflected both in better patient care and a healthier bottom line. Investments in technology that supports communication and coordination are likely to produce a financial return for any organization.

What you should do next

How can incorporating technology maximize patient satisfaction, outcomes, and staff efficiency? To answer that, you must first ask your clinical team how much time they spend on unnecessary administrative work and how this negatively affects the quality and efficiency of care, as well as their own job satisfaction. As a follow-up, ask them to consider how these would change if an effective technology solution was adopted.

Next, examine your HHCAHPS survey results and see what clues it gives you regarding your attractiveness to referral sources and how ready you are for value-based purchasing. You may discover that improved communication can lead to improvements in other areas as well.

If you find opportunities for improvement after examining your HHCAHPS results, you have a business case for implementing technology to help.

Many technology companies offer one tool that may support part of a communication strategy. However, for home-based care providers to maximize their return on investment, the tech services that support the communication strategy must be tightly integrated to deliver their full potential.

Financial Impact of Improved Communication and Collaboration		
	ESTIMATED CHANGE	**ESTIMATED FINANCIAL BENEFIT**
Better performance and efficiency	30 more patients per month	$108k additional revenue per month
Administrative efficiency	20% less turnover	$15k in cost savings per quarter

CitusHealth offers an easy-to-use, integrated platform solution designed to address the important patient communication and care team collaboration services that enable your organization to provide better care, gain greater efficiencies, and increase patient and family satisfaction.

To learn more about the CitusHealth solution for virtual patient care contact us at 800-863-9130 or visit www.citushealth.com

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