

CARE IN THE HOME NEEDS THE UNDERPINNING OF TECHNOLOGY

Boosting Transparency For Families and Providers

Home care of all types has been a booming segment of an otherwise stalled jobs market and US economy. Various research reports recently have sized it as a [\\$74 billion market in the US](#), with a 4.8% annual growth rate, [growing to \\$150.8 billion by 2018](#).

Not only does the industry lack a single dominant provider, according to the research, it also lacks the foundational underpinning of a technology platform and solutions for management and workers.

In a 2012 report, [The Future of Home Care Technology](#), a survey of management of home care, home health care and geriatric care organizations, interviewees acknowledged that if they were deployed, home care systems did not integrate information about a care recipient with a hospital electronic record system and did not support the smooth exchange of a care recipient's information across the boundaries of hospital to home-to-rehab-to-home. Interviewees confirmed the early stage of market evolution:

- **Most responders were still dependent on the telephone and e-mail.** To communicate with family members, 81% of responders relied on telephone and 54% used e-mail. Furthermore, activities of daily living (ADLs), health status and recreational activities were communicated to families at most weekly and on request.
- **Responders cited a lack of collaboration across boundaries.** Executives noted that up to that point, technology was primarily "for internal use only" –

citing lack of process ownership, a history of poor communication and inadequate hand-off between one provider and another.

- **Executives had a vision for a longitudinal plan of care.** The issue of care transitions was top of mind to interviewees. Particularly of interest was the need for managing the flow of information post discharge – whether to a rehab facility, home healthcare or to home. They particularly noted the need to underpin care services with technology that “should be consumer-friendly and enabling.”

An industry without standards or pressure to automate – until now

Several recent changes are likely to put new pressure on the services delivered to care for vulnerable individuals in their homes. First, the [readmission penalties](#) introduced by CMS and now confronting doctors and health care providers has boosted the importance of insuring that those discharged from hospitals and rehab facilities do not return quickly to the hospital. Second, the HITECH portion (2009) of the Stimulus Package provided funds and accelerated the urgency to implement [electronic medical records](#), particularly across Medicare- and Medicaid-reimbursable providers.

In addition, technology is ever-more pervasive. The past few years have precipitated a groundswell of adoption of smartphone, tablets, and other technologies among the family members of home care recipients – both among those nearby and long-distance. With so many family members adopting a wide variety of devices, technology adoption is boosting family expectations about improved communication – especially as it crosses distance and time zones.

According to Richard Brennan, VP Technology Policy, National Association for Home Care and Hospice, "Standards initiatives are now underway that will improve the sharing of information across acute care to-from post-acute care." Coupled with policy changes and penalties, changes in technology, and the requirement to implement electronic medical records, the home care industries may be entering a new era of supporting processes and improving communication about care.

Cantata Adult Life Services Views CareTreeas an Industry Game Changer

Pam Patterson is the Chief Nursing Officer at Cantata Adult Life Services in Brookfield, Illinois. In her role, she advises nursing facilities about best practices and the use of Electronic Medical Records (EMR) – overseeing Cantata at Home and Cantata Adult Life Services. When reflecting on the state-of-the-art home care technology, she observed that: "None have a means to communicate with families about the kind of care individuals are receiving – meaning that there is no way for the responsible party to understand about the care being delivered, understand the needs or wants of the care recipients, or to understand the gaps in care."

According to Pam, a new home care software system like [CareTree](#) is an example of a "Game changer" in the industry. She observes: "This system will allow the caregiver to access technology that helps them communicate to families and loved ones about how care has been delivered. Professionals in one care setting can communicate with all involved about that care, enabling the highest level of caregivers (MDs, Nurse practitioners), to know about daily care and view changes in health status."

The result could be, for the first time, “continuity of care across all levels of care in a person’s life. Finally, we will have true ‘person-centered’ care, driven by the wants and needs, the wellness, and the emotional well-being of a care recipient with all individuals who have some slice of that wellness pie.”

Participation of the Willing

Pam noted that one of the reasons organizations will find a home care system like **CareTree** a compelling solution is a result of the high tech act within the Affordable Care Act (ACA) of 2010: “Hospitals had to investigate interoperability and share data for those higher-functioning care delivery participants” – sometimes described under the heading of *meaningful use*.

She went on to say that the organizations she is working with are already sharing Activities of Daily Living (ADLs) through “straight-up email to communicate to family members.” She observed that based on her experience, home care and home health care companies that don’t embrace technology will have a limited life span. Consumers will demand it. When you’re taking care of an older and frail individual, you are taking care of someone on behalf of the responsible party for that individual.”

She went on to offer this advice to companies that are holding off evaluation of home care solutions like CareTree: “If you don’t adopt new technology, I will be happy to take your customers from you. Older baby boomers who need care services are going to want the equivalent of XFINITY (an advanced Comcast cable TV service) for use on their TVs. They are not going to want to travel half-way across the world to see how

Grandma is doing. They will want to check in at those times convenient that are convenient for them. Many of the responsible parties, typically family members, are still working. What if care recipients are in the US and the responsible parties are in Switzerland? It is burdensome for a home care agency manager to write a hundred e-mails per day. It is critical to have documentation in a secure place for families to find.”

What size organizations can use CareTree?

Pam’s view is that small storefront home care organizations can benefit from this software. But she believes that adoption will be driven by consumer families and that they will tell home care companies: “Here is software I want you to use to communicate with me. This is where I will look to see how you are taking care of my loved one.

CareTree is one of the most user friendly software packages that I have seen in a long time. Someone who is not savvy can manage it because it is very much like Facebook – thus it is appropriate for the circle of care. A communication system like **CareTree** has the potential to change the industry from the perspective of some of everything – scheduling, communication, and senior health advisors (Nurses, MDs) – and ultimately will have a billing component and integrate with established health care systems.”

For more information about CareTree, please see CareTree.Me.