

HealthCall®

PERSONALTOUCH™: CLIENT PERSPECTIVES
FIVE EXECUTIVES FROM ORGANIZATIONS ACROSS THE
UNITED STATES SHARE THEIR INSIGHTS WITH
AN INDEPENDENT AGENCY.

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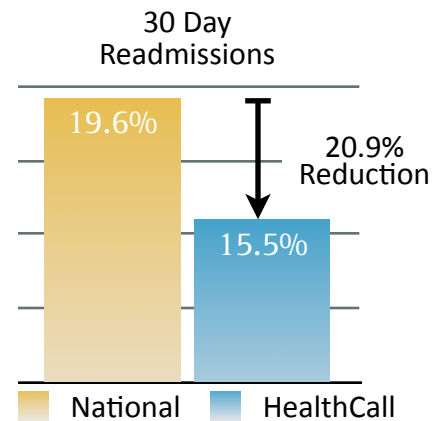
HealthCall®

PersonalTouch: Client Perspectives

HealthCall partners with home medical equipment (HME) providers to support and manage their coordination and ongoing care of their patients through its PersonalTouch™ administrative and clinical process management solution. The PersonalTouch™ program acts as an extension of the HME care team to uniquely position HME providers to help hospitals with their biggest problem--decreasing 30-day readmission rates.

With national 30-day readmission rates of Medicare beneficiaries at 19.6%, HME providers who use the PersonalTouch™ program report significantly lower patient 30-day readmission rates of 15.5%. For those HME providers who also certify their staff through HealthCall's Care Specialist Training, the 30-day readmission rate of their patients is even lower.

In addition to helping providers decrease readmission rates, the PersonalTouch™ program helps HME providers engage patients in their own wellbeing and track patient adherence to medication and care plans through services such as patient education and self-management skills, key sign and symptom tracking, health literacy reinforcement, and enhanced patient-provider relationship.



To better understand how the PersonalTouch™ program is being used by HME providers, HealthCall hired an independent agency in the summer of 2013 to interview five executives from HME organizations across the United States. They shared their insight on why they chose the PersonalTouch™ program and how it has helped them provide a new standard of patient-centered, accountable care and become a leader in a very competitive industry.

David Lyman is the Vice-President of Business Development/Strategic Planning at Hastings Professional Medical Equipment in Ohio. Hastings serves approximately 12,000 clients every month in two locations. Mr. Lyman said the motivation behind partnering with HealthCall was based on three main things. One, healthcare reform and the focus on emerging accountable care organizations left out HME providers. HME providers, like Hastings, are commonly perceived as, "just an equipment delivery company," but are really, "...a piece in the whole continuum of patient care." However, HME providers directly impact patient care through instruction and disease prevention programs that help patients and families understand the patient's health and corresponding care plan better. Two, while the patient programs provided by Hastings help patient-provider communications, Mr. Lyman acknowledged that previously there really wasn't a way for individual tracking so they could be missing numerous patients because they were depending upon the patient to contact them rather than reaching out to patients based upon a planned follow-up schedule. Three, as echoed by other executives in their interviews, he identified the fierce competitiveness of the marketplace and need to differentiate Hastings from other HME providers.

Adding the ability to monitor patients more efficiently and gather outcome data were reasons also shared by the other executives whose organizations had added the PersonalTouch™ program. Cissi Holmgren-Kates, the E-commerce/Publishing Marketing Manager at Home Med-Equip in Concord, California, recognized that hospitals and doctors are more focused on outcomes and knew that being outcome-driven would also increase the quality of the programs it offered. PersonalTouch™ aligns well with Home Med-Equip's motto "Quality care, one patient at a time" and especially with the part of their mission statement, "...to search for and embrace technologies that enhance our customer service and automate our business."

Reggie Johnson is the Controller of Care Medical in Visalia, California. He too saw an opportunity to implement a strong database management tool that would help take care of patients more efficiently, as well as increase revenue. He described how one of their goals is to navigate the complexity of the healthcare system for their referral sources and patients and, "make it as easy as possible."

Advacare Home Services, Inc. focuses its hard work and resources on patient care, clinical care, service, training, as well as staff and patient education. Tammy Zelenko, President and CEO of Advacare Home Services, Inc., which is located in Pennsylvania, said that they have always had a program for chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) patients, but having an automated system that offers continuous follow-up was new and what she was looking to implement.

For other providers, such as CornerStone Medical Services in Ohio, implementing a comprehensive program to coordinate and manage patient care was a new initiative. Stephen Holian, Area Director of Operations at CornerStone, said that they did not have a focused approach before contacting HealthCall but instead were doing several different small things, "but nothing that we could take back to our host hospital or our facilities and say, 'This is how we can help improve care.'"

All previously mentioned organizations implemented the PersonalTouch™ program at different times and varied in terms of how they customized it to best meet the needs of the organization and patient population. Along with reducing 30-day readmission rates, the key benefits of using the PersonalTouch™ program centered on patient adherence to the care plan and wellbeing.

Benefit: The PersonalTouch™ program helps HME providers manage chronic diseases and ongoing health effectively in the outpatient setting by identifying those patients vulnerable to readmission while also staying in touch with patients who are doing well.

An HME provider with the PersonalTouch™ program is in a strong position to be the provider in the continuum of care that prevents a hospital readmission because of features such as patient education and coaching, key symptom tracking ability, and better communication between the patient and healthcare providers. These features allow HME providers to optimize clinical outcomes by coordinating the right care for the right patient at the right time. All patients are

evaluated uniformly and engaged in some way regardless of health status. However, patients who need extra attention receive it.

Ms. Zelenko described how the PersonalTouch™ program allows staff to better manage patient care. For example, if a patient assessment is missed, then that patient's record is flagged for individual follow-up. She commented on how this program allows the staff to be more effective and give more focused care, "That allows us to prioritize our care and our follow-up." "Our respiratory therapists are able to prioritize their work based on the [HealthCall] task manager when we walk in everyday." In addition, she said it helps with identifying staffing needs and scheduling.

Mr. Johnson also remarked about the prioritization and allocation of human resources on those patients that really need it while also making regular connections to other patients. He said patients that need supply replenishment are quickly identified without the usual "order taking" process, which frees up staff to do coaching with patients who require it the most, such as a new CPAP user.

Feedback on the PersonalTouch™ program from the staff at CornerStone has been positive according to Mr. Holian: "Their experience is that it's a good program for identifying who those patients are with whatever disease entity. In this case we use it for COPD. The benefit is that they get to clinically care for the patients who have questions because, again, that program reaches out and asks our patients, 'Do you need or do you want a call from a respiratory therapist or nurse.' So that affords that connection between our client base and our clinicians, and they like that."

These experiences indicate how the PersonalTouch™ management program is an effective tool for managing chronic illnesses and addressing vulnerabilities to readmission through increased patient involvement and key symptom tracking.

Benefit: The PersonalTouch™ program supports regular scheduled contact with the patient through standardized, yet personable interactions, which engages the patient in his or her own care, specifically in self-monitoring and reporting.

A key component of the continuum of care and keeping the patient out of the hospital is the patient. However, patients can easily get lost in the healthcare provider shuffle; become overwhelmed with a new diagnosis and the corresponding clinical information; or lack personal responsibility for their own health. HME providers using the PersonalTouch™ program have the opportunity to set a different course for patient care from the moment supplies are delivered.

Ms. Holmgren-Kates describes the PersonalTouch™ program they use for their COPD patients as starting the minute the driver delivers the oxygen equipment. At that point, she said that the patient becomes aware that they are going to be contacted by a respiratory therapist who will then complete an initial assessment. Patients are informed that they will be monitored to make sure they do not have any flare-ups, or if they do have a flare-up, how to best address it. The

goal is to have patients understand the purpose of the program and to keep them out of the hospital. She said that most patients see the program as a benefit; understand Home Med-Equip is looking out for them; and that the, "system is there in place to help them, to guide them, and to make sure that they stay as healthy as they can in their current condition."

Mr. Lyman also reported that his company's patients really feel like the Hastings team is concerned about their health and working to increase their quality of life because of the way the staff at Hastings is communicating. He said that the patient feedback is very positive with patients appreciating the more in-depth, focused communication, rather than the standard to expect a call from them when they need to get their tanks filled. This structured yet personable contact resulted in Hastings capturing patients from another HME provider.

Patients who have completed the 30-day program with Advacare Home Services, Inc., gave the organization high ratings based on how it made a difference in their wellbeing and how they managed their disease, according to Ms. Zelenko. She credits this to the training her staff received to help patients understand how participating in the program is going to help keep them home and out of the hospital.

Mr. Johnson identified how participating in the PersonalTouch™ program can be empowering for the patients as they have the opportunity to request the help they need. Because the staff receives daily reports from HealthCall on their sleep apnea patients, they immediately know if patients need supplies, whether they need or want a return call, and whether they are having trouble with their mask, or anything else. He described how the patient inputs the data via the interactive voice response of the HealthCall system, "So it's not our hands making that determination, it's actually the patient, and we like that."

Also commenting on the interactive voice response component, Mr. Holian described it as "very flexible" in segmenting and communicating specific messages to specific patient populations.

If certain patients require a more individualized approach, the PersonalTouch™ program can be modified to fit their needs. For example, both Mr. Lyman and Mr. Holian reported that some of their patients do not like the automated calls, so for these patients, his staff is able to make a live call and customize the process. Mr. Lyman's organization has also used the option of assigning specific patients to specific clinicians. Having the capability to schedule calls ahead of time and at specific times during which the patient is likely to respond has worked out very well for Mr. Johnson's organization, Care Medical.

HME providers are pressured to lower prices, which means they can either get suppliers to lower cost or have their staff see more patients per day according to Mr. Holian. However, with the PersonalTouch™ program, "It allows our clinicians to actually reach out and touch some of our patients that otherwise we wouldn't be afforded the time to do because we are pushing so hard to do more with less."

With the PersonalTouch™ program, patient behaviors are monitored and evaluated in a way that promotes the level of attention and quality of care that patients need at that time. Allowing them the opportunity to state what they need and when, not only increases patient engagement, it promotes a sense of control in a situation in which they may feel like they have little control. In addition, HME providers are able to more effectively use staff resources and prioritize their case load.

Benefit: The PersonalTouch™ program is innovative technology that allows the sharing of data and improves team and provider communication through a cloud-based platform, which protects patient confidentiality and complies with the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA).

For hospitals to decrease 30-day readmission rates, everyone in the continuum of care will need to share patient data and communicate effectively. The PersonalTouch™ program provides this platform at the level of detail that makes a difference in outcomes. Ms. Holmgren-Kate describes the program as, "a tool for everyone who is involved in caring for this person, to make sure that their level of independence and how healthy they are is kept at the highest level possible for as long as possible." Ms. Holmgren-Kate stated that healthcare providers of their patients are liking the program as well as the feedback it provides.

Internally, HME owners found the ability to share patient information quickly and easily, which is a valuable asset for staff. Because it is all in one place, Ms. Zelenko said that all information can be shared with any therapist, which is helpful in cases in which one therapist may have done the two day follow-up, while another did the home visit and evaluation. "I also like that we have the health record right there in front of us, and that it's documented. We are then able to share that with the physician, the referral, the hospitals, and the insurance companies," said Ms. Zelenko.

Ms. Zelenko also reported that healthcare providers working with Advacare Home Services, Inc. have been "very impressed" with the detailed level of patient information that comes from the program. She said that the program is helpful in communicating when a patient has a flagged assessment, which may mean he is short of breath or unable to take medication. "All of these things are right at the tip of our fingers, where without this program, we wouldn't know that. The next step is to be able to sit at your desk and shoot off a report to a doctor or to a referral which says, 'Here's what just happened at this visit today.' They find that very valuable, very valuable."

When asked to explain how the PersonalTouch™ program has helped his organization improve communication and relationships with various entities within the healthcare field, Mr. Lyman talked about three things. One, it gives his organization the ability to share aggregate data to physician practices, in order to highlight providers who are getting better patient responses and learn what they are doing differently. Over the long-term with continued use of the program, he foresees the ability to get better trending, more accurate data, and significant outcomes. Two, as other providers see Hastings Professional Medical Equipment communicating with and

educating their patients, it strengthens the relationship and positions Hastings as a necessary component in the continuum of care. Three, being able to help hospitals reduce 30-day readmission rates opens up communication lines and possibilities of relationships that did not previously exist. Mr. Lyman described several situations in which he was able to meet with a COO of a hospital or with another healthcare provider only because of having the PersonalTouch™ program.

Using the program builds better, stronger relationships and increases communication between organizations and healthcare workers. Methods are now tracked to determine what works and what does not, satisfaction for referral sources and patients increases, and new partnerships are realized.

Overall value of the program and partnership.

When asked to comment on anything else about the PersonalTouch™ program, owners focused on its value as a program and partnership along with its comprehensiveness and simplicity.

Advacare Home Services, Inc. is HealthCall's newest client of all those interviewed. Ms. Zelenko said they are still customizing the program to make it work best for her organization and patients, but positively evaluated the PersonalTouch™ program stating, "I think it's the best thing that I did. It was a great investment."

CornerStone, one of HealthCall's long-term clients, sees the clinical value in the program. Mr. Holian simply stated, "[HealthCall] gets health care. Many people who come to us don't understand what we do on a day-to-day basis trying to take care of patients for such a small amount of money, and how every dollar is so important. HealthCall found a way to show clinical value: a service that helps promote our company and at a very cost saving model, compared to what others were doing."

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With 16 years of experience in the HME business, Mr. Lyman said, "HealthCall, in my opinion, is the only complete system that addresses these issues and helps us to better manage our patients based upon their disease state. Also, it's very easy to use. You don't have to be very computer literate to be able to maneuver in the system, make your phone calls, and see what's going on with these patients. It's very self-explanatory." While relevant to all HME providers, Ms. Holmgren-Kates thought the PersonalTouch™ program would be especially helpful to companies who do not have staff to connect with each patient like they want to.

Besides being professional, Mr. Johnson described HealthCall as, "a very solid business partner for us," and talked about bringing on additional services HealthCall offers. He saw all these services as helping Care Medical differentiate themselves from other providers.

About HealthCall, LLC

HealthCall, LLC is a leading provider of medical communication solutions used in chronic care, medication compliance, wellness programs, and administrative processes. For nearly a decade and with nearly three million patients, Healthcall has been advancing medical communications by bringing together patient outreach technologies and behavioral sciences to foster healthier self-care behaviors, and predictable outcomes.

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Endnotes

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