

When Your IT Vendor Offers Multiple Products, Use Them All, Says Successful New Hampshire VNA

It is one thing for a home care provider to achieve business and clinical advances by investing in a first-tier software system and taking full advantage of its features. It is quite another when that organization receives an award recognizing its accomplishments. Concord (New Hampshire) Regional Visiting Nurse Association credits its combination of automation tools from McKesson, and the ways it has made use of them, for helping it win the 2005 Walter J. Dunfey Award for Excellence in Non-Profit Management.

Concord Regional VNA is a not-for-profit, community-based health care organization founded in 1899 and currently a part of Capital Region Healthcare (CRHC). The agency offers a range of services from community health to home nursing and hospice to pediatric home care. With a staff of less than 300, CRVNA serves an average 680 home care and 50 hospice patients plus more than 100 pediatric patients in 30 communities from its one Concord office.

President and CEO Mary DeVeau explains that the organization started its journey toward full automation when it implemented McKesson's office automation system, *Horizon Homecare*™ in the spring of 1999 and added point-of-care in late 2000.

The VNA added *Horizon Homecare Supply Link* for online supplies ordering in the fall of 2002. Though this product originates in a separate McKesson division, it can directly update the *Horizon Homecare* database. Nurses order supplies through an automated voice mail system and the vendor ships them directly to the patient's home, further streamlining Concord's field and back office processes. Concord brought McKesson's *Horizon Homecare Telephony* online in March, 2003 and began to take full advantage of automated scheduling shortly thereafter.

As soon as CRHC implemented McKesson's physician portal in July 2005, the VNA provided referring physicians training about how to review their home care patients' plans of care and electronically sign orders. A decision support tool, *Horizon Homecare Insight* helps executives understand cost and utilization trends by presenting graphical representations of averages and actual costs, margins and utilization data. Users can view financial reports by physician, diagnosis, case-mix weight, HHRG or case manager.

In late 2005, the agency moved into the disease management and home telemonitoring arena by selecting *McKesson Telehealth Advisor*™, which uses an in-home monitoring unit from partner Health Hero Network. Implementation began with Concord's CHF patients and, says DeVeau, has expanded to include COPD and diabetes

patients. The *Health Buddy* unit collects vital signs and encourages patients to participate in their own care by reading daily reminders and teaching materials and responding to diagnosis-specific questions. Patient data collected by the remote unit is available to Concord's telehealth nurse for online review, enabling Concord to make visit schedule and care plan adjustments as needed.

Computerizing every facet of business and patient care functions, from agency management to nurses, therapists and home health aides at the point of care, to the patients themselves, has paid off for CRVNA in more than awards. "We logged one million driving miles two years ago," DeVeau said. "Last year, we reduced it by one-fourth." That is one of many significant benchmarks she cites as results of her agency's commitment to automation. Others include reduction in data entry staff, increase in the number of supervisor-reviewed cases and improved patient outcomes.

Nor does DeVeau believe that automation alone guarantees success. "The software matters," she said, explaining her position, "but what makes the difference is how you implement an application, commit to it and stick with it. I hear some of my colleagues saying, 'Oh, software doesn't work.' but that's overly simplistic. Software neither works nor does not work on its own. Management has to champion the project, ask a lot of questions of the vendor as well as of its own people and make sure that staff quantify their own questions. You have to *make* the software work for you."

It is this management attitude, supported by an array of integrated McKesson systems, which has brought measurable improvements to Concord Regional VNA's patient outcomes and financial standing. DeVeau speaks not only of dramatic mileage reductions but also of significant productivity improvements and patient outcomes gains.

One legendary CRVNA story concerns a CHF patient who was hospitalized every other week until receiving his *Health Buddy* monitor; at this writing he had managed to remain home for three continuous months. She also quotes nurses thrilled about new abilities to reduce paperwork, communicate with physicians and know far more accurately how their patients are doing.

"Technology is simply an investment you have to make," DeVeau concludes. "I honestly do not know how an agency gets by today without the information that comes through automated reports of patient and financial data. How do you know where you stand?"