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Better Patient Care Through Technology

Mobile printers streamline team-based home care nursing

By David Crist, senior vice president of sales & marketing for Brother Mobile Solutions

Fueled by aging Baby Boomers, the need for coordinated, team-based patient care is spilling beyond hospital walls into the quickly expanding realm of home health and hospice care. Approximately three million Baby Boomers will reach retirement age each year for the next two decades¹, and the great majority say they want to stay in their home as they age².

Given their longer life expectancy and tendency to have multiple chronic conditions including hypertension, arthritis, heart disease and diabetes³, it's no surprise that home care services are expected to continue to be the fastest growing sector in the U.S. economy through 2022⁴. At the same time, this demand for home care exacerbates the increasing shortage of experienced registered nurses, many of whom are also retiring.⁵

Increasingly, forward-thinking home health providers are recognizing that equipping nurses and other field clinicians with mobile technology toolkits can improve the quality of patient care by facilitating teamwork, communication, and care coordination among multiple care providers. Tools that boost productivity, improve safety, reduce the risk of error and support compliance are a necessity in the burgeoning mobile healthcare industry. These toolkits typically include mobile workforce basics like computing devices, software and peripherals such as mobile printers. In the near future, mobile cloud security systems and smart diagnostic tools which monitor or predict the activity and wellness of the homebound patient may become mainstream.



Mobile Toolkits

In today's digital world, most home health agencies, therapists and other clinicians consider smartphones, tablets or laptops nearly as essential to patient care as a blood pressure cuff or stethoscope. With the highly portable devices at their fingertips, they find it easy and convenient to document patient vitals, access medical records in real-time, check drug interactions, coordinate with other providers and the home office, and comply with government mandates relating to medical reconciliation, plan of care and other patient information.

Despite eagerly embracing technology, however, home health providers often overlook the fact that advances in wireless mobile printers make it possible to easily print 8½" x 11" hard copies of critical documents right in a patient's home. Approximately the same size and weight as a box of spaghetti, these compact, lightweight models fit easily in field bags, backpacks and larger purses - making them ideal for clinicians constantly on the move.

Supporting Safe, Well-Cordinated Care

The ability to give patients and/or family members and caregivers a printed version of key information before clinicians leave the home enhances patient safety and enables compliance with CMS or other local / Medicaid rules. It also ensures that all of the multidisciplinary care team members - including nurses, therapists, nutritionists, physicians and other specialists - who visit the patient at different times have access to the same data.

For example, home health care patients often take multiple prescription drugs with sometimes confusing instructions, increasing the risk of medication errors. Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) standards require that home health and hospice workers provide

patients with an updated detailed medication list.⁶ Handwriting the list and any additional instructions is a time-consuming hassle, not to mention the results can be difficult to read and prone to error. With a mobile printer, clinicians can easily print and leave behind updated and personalized medication lists, along with helpful administration instructions and drug interaction data, for other team members and patient caregivers to reference.

In addition, proposed CMS rules call for home health providers to furnish patients with an individualized written plan of care that would set out, among other things, the frequency and duration of therapeutic interventions. Each patient would also have the right to receive a copy of his or her individualized HHA plan of care to be kept in the home.⁷

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Once approved, these mandates will reinforce the advantage of using a mobile printer to provide the plan of care quickly and conveniently, in an easy-to-read format. Having a printed copy of the plan of care available in the patient's home plays a critical role in providing clear, unified direction for all team members to follow. In addition to supporting consistent, well-informed care, it mitigates the risk for transition of care errors or other issues that impact patient safety and outcomes.

Mobile printers also can help speed proper patient treatment by enabling clinicians to print consent, waiver and refusal of service forms and get the required signatures on the spot. In addition, they can print teaching guides, description of services performed, medication lists and detailed care instructions. This supports clinicians' ability to educate patients, family and caregivers about the patient's condition and convey complex information in what may be an emotionally charged situation - one important step in helping to avoid hospital readmissions for the patients and Medicare reimbursement penalties for providers.

Empowering Clinician Flexibility and Efficiency

With access to mobile printers that can reliably print high resolution text, graphics and pictures as fast as eight pages per minute, busy clinicians no longer need to waste precious time returning to the office to print necessary documents. Innovative advances in mobile printers make it easy to print anywhere, anytime, thanks to instantaneous connectivity and across-the-board compatibility with smartphones, tablets and laptops built on iOS, Android™, Windows® and Windows Mobile operating systems.

Low maintenance thermal mobile printers have no ink cartridges or toners to maintain or replace, providing dependable performance day after day in any temperature environment. The only consumable they require is thermal paper, which can be cut-sheet, fanfold or continuous roll, up to 8.5" wide. Long battery life supports flexibility for clinicians on the go, while a variety of mounting and power options ensure the printers adapt to almost any vehicle.

The growing demand for home health care services, coupled with the nursing shortage, puts substantial pressure on providers. As a result, robust mobile toolkits that integrate software, devices and peripherals such as printers are proving highly valuable and effective in helping clinicians deliver patient care that meets the highest standards of quality, safety and efficiency.

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