

Home Health And Mobility – Meeting Provider Needs

Source: Brother Mobile Solutions

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There are a number of issues and trends impacting the healthcare industry that should be of particular note for home health providers as the push to provide better care to more individuals continues.

First, there's Medicare reimbursement and new penalties put on hospitals with high avoidable readmissions. This increases the pressure on home health agencies to leverage technology to aid patients in following aftercare instructions, adhering to medication plans and accessing their medical information – all to better prevent costly readmissions from occurring.

Next, we're facing unprecedented growth in the number of aging Americans. Baby boomers have recently begun reaching retirement age, making the senior age group the largest population in the country. As seniors continue to live longer, and the popularity of "aging at home" continues to rise, the home health market will be tasked to streamline care and keep up with a growing patient base that requires a greater level of care over a longer period of time.

Finally, a nursing shortage continues to impact hospitals, where the lack of nurses may contribute to patients being discharged earlier, putting the burden of recovery on care received once the patient has returned home. The good news is, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2012), there will be nearly 712,000 new nursing positions by 2020, and the bureau predicts this will be mostly in outpatient settings, home healthcare, and nursing homes.

Mobile technology and the ability to fulfill the same data demands in-home as in-hospital will play a role in helping home health agencies meet these issues head-on.

Addressing meaningful use and compliance mandates

In addition to trends, healthcare organizations are tasked with meeting a number of compliance mandates and requirements, including Meaningful Use, ICD-10, CMS guidelines, and EHR adoption.

One of the requirements of Meaningful Use Stage 2 is that patients must be provided the ability to view online, download, and transmit their health information within 36 hours after discharge from the hospital. Mobile technology will play a big role toward meeting this requirement during the at-home care process.

The challenge for home healthcare organizations will also be how to plan ahead and build upon the lessons learned from Stage 2 as they move on to Stage 3. Patient engagement, health information exchange (HIE), and clinical decision support—all part of Stage 2—are expected to be expanded in Stage 3, and technology will play a pivotal role for home healthcare compliance. However, small organizations without CIOs, CTOs, or dedicated IT Directors may feel challenged in the IT decision-making process.

Coupled with Meaningful Use requirements, all healthcare entities, including home health agencies, must convert from ICD-9 to ICD-10 coding by October 1, 2014. Having the right mobile technology to code correctly will be imperative. Finally, a new CMS rule that took effect October 1, 2013, will govern quality measures for Medicare hospice, expanding the requirements for collecting and reporting quality-of-care measures.

Mobility – An Integral Piece of the Healthcare Puzzle

Home health providers will soon be held to the same standards for data handling and patient service as other healthcare entities. As such, mobile technology must integrate with a home healthcare worker's workflow and promote access to treatment records, educational materials, and billing information, all without sacrificing treatment quality or data security. Mobile technologies that help achieve these goals include barcode scanners, which help verify that the right medication and dose is given to the right patient. Also integral are tablets, notebooks and smartphones, which allow for access to EMR and patient records in-home. And finally, mobile printers will be an invaluable asset allowing for the printing of barcode labels, treatment instructions, updated medication plans and more, anytime from anywhere. All these technologies help home health agencies address industry standards while providing the best mobile care for patients.

Reference

Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2012, February). *Employment projections: 2010-2020 summary*. Available at <http://bls.gov/news.release/ecopro.nr0.htm>

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