

Caris Healthcare Uses Telehospice Technology to Improve Patient Care and Reduce Nurse Visits

At a Glance

Organization

Caris Healthcare
Knoxville, Tenn.

- Average daily census of 600+ hospice patients
- 150 clinicians, administrators and staff

Solution Spotlight

- McKesson Telehealth Advisor

Critical Issues

- Frequent nurse visits
- Extended nurse visits
- Lack of care knowledge by patients and families
- Cost of care management

Results

- Reduced the number of nurse visits by 50%
- Reduced the average duration of nurse visits by 50%
- Decreased instances of patient crisis through better education
- Saved \$100 per week, per patient

Profile

As a leading hospice provider in Tennessee, Caris Healthcare was eager to investigate how technology could help to improve patient education and increase care delivery efficiencies. Caris launched a pilot study of a telehospice solution. The results were astounding. The solution not only empowered caregivers to provide more effective care, but also helped Caris reduce both visit frequency and visit duration by 50%.

Challenges

In 2006, Caris set out to provide more efficient care to hospice patients and to enhance care management by both caregivers and patients. One of the provider's goals was to boost the comfort level – physical and emotional – of patients and their caregivers. "We needed to improve the knowledge level of our patients," explains Rhonda Perrin Oakes, project manager for Caris Healthcare. "We decided to focus on delivering end-of-life education to reinforce symptom management and reduce patient and family anxiety."

Answers

Caris Healthcare initiated a four-month project to study the effectiveness of telehospice technology to educate patients and their families and reduce the cost of providing care. Caris

selected McKesson Telehealth Advisor™, a remote monitoring solution, powered by the Health Buddy® System, which provides two-way communication of physiological, educational and compliance information between the patient and the care provider.

The organization deployed the system in 10 homes that were at least 30 miles from a Caris branch office. Using the system's in-home device, the Health Buddy® Appliance from Health Hero Network, Caris could transmit patient- and diagnosis-specific education to the home and collect daily vital sign and symptom information from the patient.

The system's flexibility meant the patient could complete the daily session at any time, but Caris discovered that most sessions were performed around 4 a.m. "Before McKesson Telehealth Advisor, patients or their families might get up and call the nurse immediately," says Oakes. "Now, they get up and conduct their telehospice session. It often eases their minds and buys our nurses a few more hours of sleep."

The early-morning sessions also helped Caris monitor patients more effectively. According to Oakes, she reviewed patient transmissions at 6 a.m., knowing that most were completed just two hours before. If a patient response indicated escalating anxiety or symptom

Case Study

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Project manager

Caris Healthcare

exacerbation, a hospice nurse would call or visit the home. “The families were ‘wowed’ that we could respond in less than two hours,” says Oakes.

Patients and caregivers were enthusiastic about the system. Every family that participated in the program provided positive feedback that the daily telehospice sessions made them feel “more connected.”

Results

Caris’ implementation of the McKesson Telehealth Advisor solution improved the education level of patients and families by transmitting specific end-of-life information directly into the homes. Patients and families accessed the information at their own speed and responded to diagnosis- and patient-specific questions. Caris used this information to provide targeted, effective care. This improved patient self-care and reduced care-related anxiety among family members.

According to Oakes, the telehospice solution produced tangible improvements in care management by both families and patients. Delivering daily reinforcement about appropriate care activities equipped caregivers to provide more effective care. For example, the system helped caregivers to understand the implications of proper bowel care and resulted in the need for fewer

enemas. Such behavioral change reduced instances of exacerbation and helped Caris reduce in-home visits by 50%.

By helping Caris target intervention based on demonstrated patient need, McKesson Telehealth Advisor also helped the agency identify caregiver exhaustion and symptom exacerbation trends. Caris can intervene and begin continuous care before the family takes the patient to a noncontracted care facility. “McKesson Telehealth Advisor reminds me of hurricane tracking,” explains Oakes. “It’s so easy to see how the ‘storm’ is advancing and what the team needs to do next.”

In addition to requiring fewer visits, average visit length was reduced because of what Oakes calls McKesson Telehealth Advisor’s “ramped-up” education. Since patients and families receive education daily, nurses spend less time on education during home visits — in most cases reducing the visit length by as much as 50%. “On average, we saved \$100 per week, per patient,” she says.

With McKesson Telehealth Advisor’s proven ability to enhance the lives of patients and their families and improve agency efficiency, Caris Healthcare sees telehospice as a permanent fixture in future care delivery.

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