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# Assessing the Right Technology for Your Remote Patient Care Program

## *Key Clinical and Technical Considerations*

The telehealth industry is rapidly evolving, and clear segments are being defined that align to specific requirements in the continuum of care. Remote care management for patients with chronic diseases is one area that shows the most promise, with a projected $1 billion market by 2017.[1] A clinically driven remote care management program can help a healthcare organization control the costs of managing members that consume the largest portion of healthcare services by helping these individuals control their disease. As more companies enter the market, health plans and health systems may find it increasingly difficult to differentiate amongst the offered technologies. Each organization and each program is unique, yet there are common criteria that can be used to assess the value of a technology solution in improving care, changing behavior, and reducing costs. Below are some key clinical and technical considerations.

## Clinical Considerations

A primary goal of a remote care management program is to drive lasting behavior change in members with chronic conditions; this helps better manage disease, improve health, and ultimately reduce costs. The right technology can help facilitate behavior change if implemented as part of a clinician-led model of care. During your technology evaluation, consider if the technology meets the following criteria:

### Timely, Specific, and Personal Care

Delivering care that is timely, specific, and personal is important for driving behavior change. In order to achieve this in a scalable and cost-effective manner, technology should enable a clinician or healthcare provider to assess a member's situation at any specific time, quickly select the appropriate education or suggestions to deliver to the member, and offer an efficient mechanism for clinician/member interaction, such as real-time videoconferencing.

### Care Model Improves Patient Engagement

When considering a technology, determine if the care model is improving patient engagement by creating strong connections between members and nurses. For example, are members using videoconferencing to improve adherence to clinical recommendations? Are members being asked the right questions by clinically scripted programs so healthcare professionals have the right information to provide proactive, real-time, efficient care? Focused, high-touch interactions between members and clinicians are key to behavior change. The right technology will include features designed to bring clinicians and members together as well as effectively use resources to deliver timely and personal care to the right members at the right time.

- Videoconferencing allows clinicians to observe members and helps them take notice of changes in condition as well as develop a trusting and honest relationship, which can make a meaningful difference. In addition, videoconferencing can help clinicians deliver just-in-time education to help a patient understand his or her behaviors and how they impact overall health. Video education can also be more effective because the video content sent to patients can be targeted to the specific patient needs, which results in more personal care.

- In order to understand how a patient is feeling on a particular day or at a particular time, the right questions are critical. Dynamic, interactive questions and answers delivered using technology should allow for assessment of the member's situation. For example, if a member indicates that they are feeling more tired than usual, the system should automatically ask questions about why that may be recent exertion, recent weight increase, infection or illness and provide appropriate video education. Further, the clinician can then use this information to optimize their care plans by focusing on the members with the greatest need, rather than intervening based on non-clinical criteria, such as a member's last name or the day of the month.

### A Solution that Can be Used Across Disease Management Programs

Forty-five percent of the population aged 65 and older have two or more chronic conditions.[2] Due to the increasing growth of this population, it is critical to consider a program that is not disease specific. Solutions targeting individual conditions do not meet the needs of those with multiple conditions, and require the enterprise to acquire, learn, integrate, manage and maintain multiple, disconnected systems. The needs and drivers of behavior change vary for each type of audience. If a technology vendor only focuses on one area, such as diabetes, their solution may be limited to only patients with diabetes. A technology that uses a framework based on the tenets of change management, however, delivers the capacity to tailor solutions to multiple target audiences with co-morbidities, giving organizations greater flexibility in their care plan delivery—and giving members a more tailored care plan.

## Technical Considerations

Once it is clear that the clinical aspects of the technology can help your organization reach your objectives, you can begin to examine the technical aspects and how they fit your needs.

### Connectivity Options

When it comes to remote care management technology, connectivity should be considered in two ways.

- The first is how the end users connect to the Internet. Since connectivity situations differ across the country and among member populations, remote care technology should include a variety of connectivity options, such as wireless, wired broadband, 3G, and 4G.

- The other aspect of connectivity relates to the clinical interface. Data is more powerful when it is shared between systems, so your technology should enable robust communication rather than silo the data. The application programming interface (API), or the way applications talk to one another, is a key consideration. Integrated, robust, documented, and supported APIs provides several important benefits, including: the ability to seamlessly move data out of the system in a timely manner and into an EMR; mine the health, behavior, and outcome data; and support discharge planners in setting up managed care for members when they leave the hospital. A technology vendor should offer both a Software Developer's Kit for their APIs as well as turnkey integration through a professional service offering.

## Privacy and Security

Partners should mandate technical and operational adherence to privacy and security laws and best practices. The technology partner should agree to meet HIPAA compliance standards, and all data should be encrypted. Technology developers should also have comprehensive security training in place. On the back end, there should be separation of responsibilities so patient data is only accessible to the people who absolutely need access. This type of checks and balances system ensures both you and your members are protected.

## FDA Review and Clearance

Purchasers may question the difference between remote care management technology that has received FDA clearance versus technology that has not. Many remote care management devices are marketed without FDA clearance. However, considering that important clinical decisions are made based on the data collected through the remote care technology, health plans and health systems may want to know more about what is involved in gaining FDA clearance. To gain clearance, the FDA requires a company to validate and verify that the product is safe and effective, and provide evidence that the product conforms with all performance and outcome claims. While FDA clearance is not an endorsement of a product, it does give meaningful assurance that the product is designed to do what the company claims it will do. It is important to invest in a platform that is safe, effective, reliable and compliant.

## Cloud Hosting

The question of who hosts the data—the service provider or technology partner—often comes up along with questions about security. While it is not uncommon for health plans or health systems to host their own care management suite, hosting by the technology partner can be advantageous. Among many other benefits, health plans and health systems can avoid infrastructure costs, limit the expense of installing servers or training people to manage those servers, and provide seamless software updates. Technology partners who offer data hosting capabilities can provide these services at lower costs because of the efficiencies gained through economies of scale.

## Conclusion

It is an exciting time for organizations that are starting a remote care management program because innovation is strong within the industry. By asking the right questions of a technology partner and truly understanding the capabilities and benefits of the technology solutions they deliver, organizations can improve member health while also reducing costs.

## For More Information

To learn more about Care Innovations™ or to view an online overview of our remote care management platform, visit careinnovations.com.

## References Consulted

[1]InMedica*, Telehealth, An Analysis of Demand Dynamics, November 2012
[2]CDC/NCHS, National Health Interview Survey. http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/databriefs/db100.htm

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