Automation becomes second nature at home care agencies

By ANDREA DECKERT

From remote monitoring of vital signs taken at home to video conferencing with doctors in patients’ living rooms, automation is making it easier for area home care agencies to meet demand.

“It does help tremendously,” says Nancy Horn, vice president of operations/administrator, clinical services, at Rochester Regional Health Lifetime Care Home Health Care and Hospice.

The home care arm of the organization serves an eight-county region. Horn says using technology in home care began as people became more aware of the capabilities and, also, to help combat a worker shortage in the medical field.

The use of technology has since expanded and continues to grow, she says.

One area Horn says her agency uses automation is remote monitoring, which collects a patient’s health data — such as weight, blood pressure, and blood oxygen — at home and transmits it electronically to the care team.

The equipment allows the team to manage the patient’s condition and help prevent re-hospitalization. Most conditions can be resolved over the phone and, if not, a member of the care team can be sent to the home and follow-up calls can be made to the doctor, Horn adds.

Rochester Regional also offers a 24-hour personal emergency response system, which is currently used by roughly 800 patients.

One press of a small, waterproof help button, worn as a necklace or bracelet, activates the response system. When pressed, patients are in touch with a trained operator in seconds who will determine what kind of help the patient needs.

While the personal emergency response system has been in place for roughly a decade, more recent technological upgrades have been made, Horn says.

For example, the personal emergency response system now has reverse global positioning system capabilities, meaning if someone cannot be located, the device can be tracked to the person’s location.

The latest technology, Horn says, is remote monitoring of vital signs taken at home to video conferencing with doctors in patients’ living rooms, making it easier for area home care agencies to meet demand.

“All this technology allows us to see and speak with a care team remotely,” Horn says. “And gives their family members more peace of mind.”

Ramp up its televisits

Technology is also be used to improve care more behind the scenes, such as automated order tracking and the creation of a physicians’ portal, which allows doctors to log in and sign orders and complete documentation, Horn says.

She adds the organization will continue to look at ways to use new technology to help meet demand, noting the agency is seeking some grant funding to help with new areas targeting patient care.

“We are constantly looking at new technology, and a lot of it is quite fascinating, but we need to find what works best for us,” Horn says.

UR Medicine Home Care is also using technology and automated processes to meet demand in the seven-county region the agency serves, says Jane Shukitis, president and CEO.

For the past 18 months, wound care nurses have been using technology to improve care and efficiency, adds Bethany Rague, vice president of clinical operations at UR Medicine Home Care.

With the help of Zoom, a web and video conferencing platform compliant with the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act, medical team members can take pictures of the wounds on their mobile devices.

Those pictures then become part of the patient’s medical record and care team members can track the progress of the wound to make sure it is healing properly.

“It’s such a huge improvement over what was done in the past,” Rague says.

In April, UR Medicine Home Care is starting a pilot program that will use technology to help avoid emergency room visits by seniors residing in assisted living facilities, Shukitis notes.

When a resident in the assisted living facility has a medical difficulty, such as shortness of breath, a fall or a wound, they are normally sent to the emergency department for assessment.

Under the pilot program, however, UR Medicine Care will send personnel to the assisted living facility in a timely manner with a telemedicine connection which will allow them to access a provider in real time who can determine if an emer-
“UR Medicine Home Care is also using technology and automated processes to meet demand in the seven-county region the agency serves.”

— Jane Shukitis

agency room visit is warranted or if the medical staff from the home care agency is able to administer treatment.

The pilot program will include a few sites in Monroe County, but if successful, the agency hopes to expand to other parts of the coverage area, Shukitis says.

And like other home care agencies, UR Medicine Home Care uses technology to monitor patients’ vital signs between clinical visits.

The agency deploys equipment to patient’s home, which allows them to check their own vital signs daily and then digitally send those results to the agency where nurses can track the data and address them if any issues arise.

Rague notes the technology can also help the agency when it comes to teaching patients on how behaviors impact their vital signs. Areas such as blood pressure and weight can be impacted by patient choices and making adjustments can have a positive impact that they are then able to see first-hand, she says.

Automation also plays a role at All-American Home Care, says CEO Marco Altieri. The business, founded in 2015, has over 1,000 employees and serves people with developmental disabilities in 25 counties across New York.

Much of the automation used at All-American Home Care is related to bookkeeping and back office functions, Altieri notes. For example, the agency uses complete electronic bookkeeping, allowing employees to clock in and out using a mobile application on their cell phones.

The process reduces the amount of paperwork and it not only provides more accurate bookkeeping, but the real time process allows the employees to have more face-to-face time with clients, he says.

All-American Home Care also utilizes a customer relationship management system that helps ensure that clients are not neglected and all of their needs are addressed properly.

Automation also helps in handling client intake and ensuring that the agency is able to quickly schedule appointments and ensure that all necessary information is gathered.

Most importantly, automation helps in the medical aspect of the agency. It helps in monitoring patients’ vital signs between clinical visits and ensures that no critical information is missed.

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Agencies measure the value of older adults in community

Aging Alliance of Rochester and Monroe County

The number of older adults in our state and region continues to grow and this dramatic change offers many financial and social advantages. New Yorkers ages 65 and older are the fastest growing segment of the population and now outnumber children under 13. The value of our growing older adult population is not only in their spending power, but also in the volunteer services they provide. The Corporation for National & Community Service reports that Rochester baby boomers have the fourth-highest volunteer rate among baby boomers in large cities. According to the New York State Office for the Aging, the annual Social Security payments in Monroe County total $3.5 billion and represent 17 percent of all income in the county, not including pensions and other retirement income.

Older adults sit on boards of directors, mentor at-risk youth, usher at cultural events, deliver meals-on-wheels, and care for their grandchildren. Regardless of whether your passion is the arts, environment, cultural events, deliver meals-on-wheels, or volunteer drivers, most of whom are over 60 years of age and have provided about 30,000 trips a year. Volunteers in the Senior Companion program help almost 200 low income older adults maintain their independence through assistance with transportation and home visitation.

According to the New York State Office for the Aging, the unpaid work of older adult volunteers in the Finger Lakes Region is valued at more than $457 million, and Monroe County’s Retired Senior Volunteer Program, or RSVP, reports that the annual contribution of its volunteers is $283 million! Nonetheless, it is impossible to measure all of the social and economic value older adults provide in their caregiving support for families, friends and neighbors.

In addition to the value of their volunteerism, there are solid economic reasons to make Monroe County a lifetime community for older adults. Our growing population of older adults provides significant economic benefit to our state and region. An AARP study found that baby boomers in New York State’s workforce are set to deliver $179 billion a year to the state’s economy in their retirement.

In New York State, baby boomers (people born during the years 1946-1964) and older account for 63 percent of all personal income generated. Pensions and Social Security payments provide stability to our economy; especially in times of economic slowdowns. For every dollar of Social Security received, $1.93 or $6.8 billion of economic input is generated.

Philanthropy plays a significant role in supporting our community’s nonprofit organizations, and baby boomers give the most of any generation to charity. The findings of a study by the Blackbaud Institute for Philanthropic Impact suggest that boomers contributed $58.6 billion to nonprofits in 2017, accounting for 41 percent of all contributions. The average American charitable donor is age 64, which suggests that boomers will remain the biggest and most important source of charitable dollars for the next few years. And while fewer in number, the older Silent Generation remains a significant force in charitable giving, contributing an estimated $29 billion last year, or 20 percent of all charitable donations.

The Aging Alliance of Rochester and Monroe County believes that it is time to reframe our society’s simplistic belief that retirement is a life of leisure, a life in a skilled nursing facility, or that older people are a burden to society. While we recognize there are very real challenges associated with aging there is another side to the story. Older Rochesterians have a wealth of time, talent, and experience to share, and with their high rate of volunteerism, they make a significant contribution to our community. This is a positive trend that promises to continue with the aging of our baby boomers.


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