

Tech-savvy providers reap high speed benefits to bottom line

BY WILLIAM WILLIAMS

NASHVILLE BUSINESS JOURNAL CONTRIBUTOR

Daniel Hogan knows the value of technology.

Hogan is president and CEO of Manchester, Tenn.-based Doctors Associates Home Health.

Because home health care providers are subject to different documentation and filing requirements by both the State of Tennessee and the federal Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, Hogan's staff was spending lots of time and money processing requisite paperwork.

Varying deadlines, ranging from seven to 60 days, just complicated the process.

To streamline filing, the company bought software called Patron, which was created by Baton Rouge, La.-based Lewis Co.

"We needed two full-time people to monitor the paperwork and these deadlines in order to assure ourselves that we were meeting and exceeding the government standards," Hogan says. "Now, I have one person that devotes maybe 20 percent of her time to generating the reports necessary to monitor this crucial element of our business. This efficiency has allowed us to process our claims an average of eight days faster."

Joey Dunagan, a partner in Nashville-based business process improvement company Fident, says doctors and physician groups are often vulnerable to inefficiencies in back-office functions.



TODD STRINGER | NASHVILLE BUSINESS JOURNAL

Mary Claus, director of finance at Emdeon Business Services, with Anita Mayo.

"Electronic claims submission is a clear opportunity to leverage technology to submit claims more accurately and efficiently," Dunagan says. "The outcome ... is a repeatable process that translates into faster payments and more cash to the bottom line."

When it comes to the melding of health care and information technology, there's almost limitless business potential, say local health care tech industry insiders.

Nashville-based Emdeon's recent purchase of GE Healthcare Information Technology's patient statement business underscores the potential there is in streamlining health care back-office functions.

Emdeon Business Services specializes in revenue and payment-cycle management. The GE Healthcare division it bought for an undisclosed sum handles bulk printing and mailing services for about 400 hospitals and physician groups.

"There is an increasing movement toward consumerism in health care," says Tommy Lewis, Emdeon's vice president of marketing. "Benefits plans are changing, patients are taking on more of the financial responsibility, and deductibles and co-pays are increasing."

As a result, Tennessee's health care providers are relying on health care IT systems and software to handle claims pro-

cessing, electronic health records management and administrative functions.

Lewis says "e-Prescribing" and disease management offer more fertile ground for growth in the IT sector.

He says companies that offer comprehensive strategies and can target emerging trends in health care IT will benefit.

Dr. David Osborn is executive director of Nashville-based Health Care Solutions Group, a think tank overseen by Vanderbilt University Medical Center and the Nashville Health Care Council.

Osborn says the marketing of software for computerized physician order entry of lab tests, to place patients on medication or order diagnostic procedures is another market that's virtually untapped.

"More than 90 percent (of healthcare providers are) doing it in a paper world," Osborn says. "At Vanderbilt, 85 percent is being done via (computerized physician order entry), and it's had a huge impact on costs, quality and patient safety."

Don Kilgore, chief marketing officer for Memphis-based Unified Health Services, says "front-office-to-back-office work comp claim management solutions" offer another untapped opportunity.

Other key health care IT growth areas, Kilgore says, include implementation of electronic medical records, data management and the integration of clinical and financial software applications.

WILLIAM WILLIAMS is a Nashville-based freelance writer.