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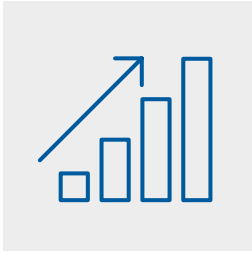
Home Health, Hospice, and Palliative Care solutions

Executive strategies on navigating our changing industry.

After a whirlwind year of massive regulation changes and a global pandemic, the home health and hospice industry has found itself in rapid acceleration. What would have typically taken years has happened in months. And while the industry has seen many negatives with this growth, it has also seen many positives.

Whether it's the emergence of preferred providers, the transition from fee-for-service to fee-for-value, the raised minimum wages, or the increased margin pressures—a lot has happened in a compressed amount of time, and there's only one solution that can offer continuous relief: technology.

We talked with four of the most prominent thought leaders and thinkers in our industry who represent diverse care settings, health systems, and geographical regions. Together, they break down some of the biggest challenges they faced in 2020, how technology addresses those challenges, and their predictions for 2021 and beyond.

Renee McInnes

RN, BS, CEO, NVNA and Hospice

Denise Schrader

MSN RN, NEA-BC, Vice President, Integrated Services, Mosaic Life Care

Tarrah Lowry

CEO, Sangre de Cristo Community Care

Ken Albert

RN, Esq., President & CEO, Androscoggin Home Health + Hospice

The silver linings of a challenging pandemic.

With constantly changing guidelines from the CDC and other regulatory bodies, the key to surviving the COVID-19 pandemic for many agencies has been communication—and not just with staff, but also with patients, families, care partners, and the public. "You feel like you've been in a rapid fire communication from the CDC, the state, Medicare," said Schrader. "We've run an incident command center for a full year, meeting once or twice a day just to stay up on communication."

Technology cannot solve everything, but it's going to play a huge role as we keep moving forward.

Navin Gupta, Home Health & Hospice, MatrixCare

The need for constant communication has forced agencies to get creative with how to interact with staff and patients. From telehealth to Zoom meetings, remote communication has become the new normal. "We started doing townhalls with Zoom," said McInnes. "Normally, trying to get remote workers into the office for meetings is impossible, but these were great because we got a lot of participants who felt appreciated and informed."

It's this vital communication that has solidified the importance of mask policies and PPE within health systems, protocols that have had surprising benefits into 2021. "With more than 400,000 patients in the area, we've had two cases of the flu," said Schrader. "Two. That's unheard of."

But hand hygiene and PPE aren't the only lasting benefits that agencies are taking away from this pandemic. Embracing relationships and collaboration has proven to be a necessity in an industry where everyone is facing the same critical challenges.

"Once a nursing home had an outbreak that was devastating to the staff, patients and families," said Schrader. "We extended a hand of our caregivers with the skills to have end-of-life discussions, and they embraced it."

The role of technology—and its many benefits.

While remote patient monitoring has not been fully embraced by CMS and payors, it's been a key strategy in navigating pandemic challenges. "Remote patient monitoring can be effective for virtual visits, but for a palliative care team, it's more efficient for us to keep physicians in a single location and have our clinical teams in the field set up the patient for a remote visit," said Albert. "Identifying that proper virtual visit platform has been important for us and our medical staff."

Telehealth not only solved the need for distancing, but has also created more thorough care. "We noticed our medication reconciliation was improving, so we've continued to do post-admission reviews of medications through virtual visits," said McInnes. "Patients and families often don't retain everything from admission visits, so following up is important."

Just as patients and families have needed support during this difficult time, staff needs reassurance as well. "A nurse going out and seeing COVID-positive patients, she needs questions answered quickly and to know that her team is always available," said Lowry. "Thinking back on the days when everything was paper, we couldn't have handled COVID the same way that we do now."

From remote patient monitoring to virtual care platforms, building a strategy starts with conversations with your technology partner. "While it was hard—and it still is," said Lowry, "it was also a time for home-based services to really shine. And that was because of the technology that we all have."

COVID was the perfect place for us to showcase how technology can truly keep an organization running.

Tarrah Lowry

Tracking major KPIs to demonstrate good quality outcomes.

When it comes to using data to maximize clinical outcomes and to work with referrals, the goal is to remove patients from the silos and recognize that care needs to happen collaboratively across the continuum. "We're moving in a direction where we have to be able to take a referral without needing them to identify which service line that patient needs," said Albert. "We need to be able to look at data from multiple points, as real time as possible, to identify an overall risk score that gives us a level of acuity."

By having a better understanding of the predictive prognosis or the length of life, data can provide the resource intensity necessary to care for particular patient populations. "Along with patient and family satisfaction," Albert said, "that's the value we bring to our referral sources."

If you don't have a data strategy or analytic strategy, it's the right time to be stepping into this.

Ken Albert

But data is only helpful when it's timely. Getting an analytics report a week or month later isn't what you need for a successful operation. "We're way above national standards in our functional scores, case weights, coding—all the key measures," said Schrader. "The reason why is because we have that information every day, and we are so grateful our software can do that."

Technology's future role in home health and hospice.

With hindsight in 2021 of what's happened over the last several quarters of the pandemic, technology has played a large part in agencies enduring challenges of COVID-19—especially with the acceleration of virtual care. But what role will technology play in the future of our industry as we drive these strategies forward?

One area that many experts believe technology will have a large impact is recruitment. While the struggle to recruit quality nursing staff is nothing new, the right tools to help profile both soft and hard skills can lead to better staffing. "And it's not only recruitment, but retention as well," said Schrader. "The primary reason our staff used to leave our organization was the EMR—but that no longer happens, they're happy with our EMR."

Clinician satisfaction and reduced cost of care go hand in hand, as nurses can easily do more charting at the point of care, leading to less labor costs—and less accuracy issues—down the workflow. "It really starts with the orientation, the education, and the onboarding to teach clinicians to do as much documentation in the home as possible," said McInnes.

Voice-to-text is another component driving efficiency through the use of technology. "It saves a lot of time, and the clinicians absolutely love that," said Lowry. "Rather than having to type out their notes in the home or their car, clinicians are able to talk about their visit and it goes straight to text—it's a game changer."

We're not talking about Siri here, we're talking about a HIPAA-compliant solution catered for home health and hospice, with the capability to capture a dictation of medical terms.

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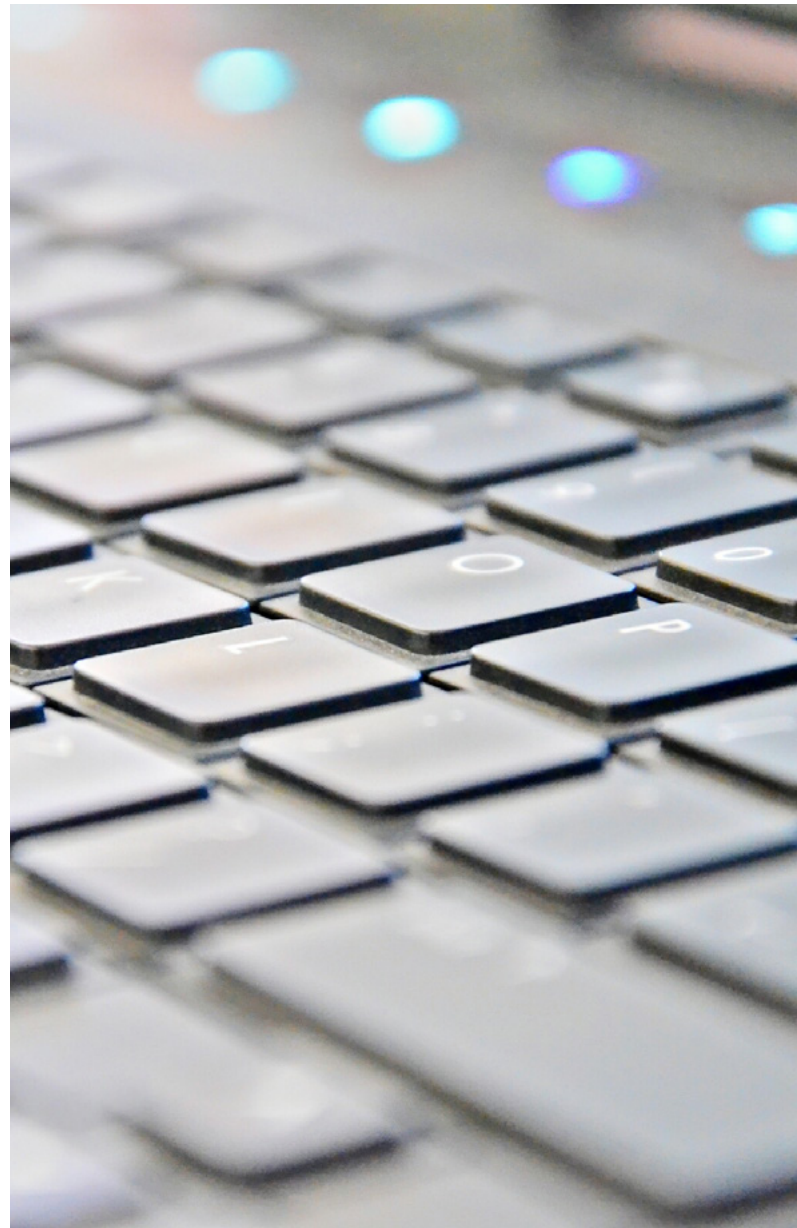
The importance of a trusted technology partner.

No agency is perfect, but many strive to be. And the same should always hold true for technology partners. "When something doesn't go right, that's when you see how your partners are," said Lowry. "If they're working hard to get you through a problem, that's what partners do for each other."

While other partners might have just one vendor option, MatrixCare evolves based on their customers' needs to expand interoperability. "A partner that asks how things are going and what keeps you up at night that they can maybe help you solve," said Lowry. "That's what we need and that's what I have, and I'm very thankful for that."

Your technology partner is not just a clinical partner, but also a business partner. They should always be willing to listen to you and your team, to work toward designing a product that meets your innovative strategy, or to allow you to invest in the engineering component.

A huge part of the process is onboarding new technology—and you need a partner that is willing to invest time in your team to ensure everyone understands not only the functionality, but also the value it brings to their work. "There's a learning curve," said McInnes. "You need a partner that's going to support the education of your entire team."

Beyond educating staff on how to use the technology, your partner should provide a complete understanding of how the product can be maximized to your benefit. "What's critically important is knowing that you're maximizing the product you're purchasing," said Albert. "Having a good

business and vendor partnership that has workflows to analyze the extent to which you're maximizing the product is important."

No matter how it's used, technology will undoubtedly continue to have a positive impact on home health and hospice agencies as they evolve with changing regulations, overcome the lingering pandemic, and become more competitive in the marketplace. "Because of COVID, people want to stay at home, rehab at home, and only go to facilities if they absolutely have to—and we're the ones who can help them do that," said Lowry. "It's our turn to shine, and these years are going to be good for home health and hospice."

It has to be a team, there has to be transparency, there has to be communication.

Navin Gupta, Home Health & Hospice, MatrixCare

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