

Electronic Discharge by Total Living Choices Creates Efficiencies for Post-Acute Care Providers

Health-care providers are under considerable pressure to control costs and increase efficiency while providing quality care. Post-acute care providers also must work as efficiently as possible to facilitate a smooth and comfortable care transition. Web-enabled discharge systems, such as Care Finder-Pro® from Total Living Choices help streamline patient discharge from hospitals to post-acute providers such as nursing homes, skilled nursing facilities, assisted and independent living facilities, home health, home care and hospice.

The Need for Efficient Discharge

A hospital discharge planner traditionally takes several steps to secure a patient's post-acute care placement. Case managers could spend hours phoning and faxing multiple facilities and waiting for a response.

On the other end, post-acute care providers need to be available to receive these placement requests from hospitals. Inability to read handwritten requests and submission forms from hospitals can lead to confusion and further delays. Without an electronic discharge system, finding post-acute care and communicating the large amounts of information required for patient transfer can be time-consuming, cumbersome and frustrating.

Advantages of Implementing Care Finder-Pro

TLC maintains the largest known database of more than 68,000 post-acute care providers in the U.S. TLC's tools automate the discharge process and educate families, resulting in a less stressful, more streamlined process and a

better experience for everyone. Care Finder-Pro is a transitional care program for hospitals that gives case management staff instant access to every licensed post-acute care provider in the nation.

In addition to Care Finder-Pro, TLC's Family Programs further expedite the discharge process by educating and assisting patients in researching the appropriate type of care and viable post-acute care providers.

1. Increase in visibility and qualified referrals

Post-acute care providers that use Care Finder-Pro to connect with hospitals note multiple benefits in terms of efficiency, awareness and increased admissions. Through Care Finder-Pro and TLC's comprehensive database, post-acute care providers have greater exposure to hospital case managers. The program provides access to post-acute facilities across the country, and enables post-acute care providers to promote their services to a larger audience.

Affordable website development and hosting options allow even more exposure for providers. Facilities that have a website listing on www.tlchoices.com, receive six times more patient referrals than those that don't. TLC's tools reach consumers and discharge planners through hospitals, state and national health associations and other non-profit associations across the country. Through tools embedded in health-care partner's websites or on tlchoices.com, TLC receives more than 25,000 hits per month and an average of 300,000 hits per year.

Home Instead Senior Care® is a network of locally-owned franchises that provide home care services to seniors that want to live independently in their own homes. Home Instead uses TLC's electronic discharge system to help increase visibility and increase referrals.

"Advertising on TLC's website is a different way for us to touch health-care professionals by letting them see that we are supporting organizations and resources that they're using," said Mary Alexander, director of business relationships for Home Instead Senior Care.

Providers can choose from a variety of website options including personalization features, virtual tours, photos and level of visibility on search pages. Additional web services include online tour scheduling and a monthly report showing hits to their website.

2. Saves staff time

By streamlining communication between hospitals and post-acute providers, and then matching the post-acute care provider's clinical offerings with a patient's social needs, the transfer process is more efficient, resulting in a higher level of satisfaction for everyone involved.

Jolene Goodenberger, coordinator of admissions at Immanuel Fontenelle in Omaha, Neb., has been using Care Finder-Pro since 2008 and feels the program works well in getting electronic referrals from nearby hospitals. "TLC has saved staff time," Goodenberger said. "The program has been helpful in reducing the number of phone calls and increasing efficiency with referrals."

TLC's ease of use helps Rancho Los Amigos in Downey, Calif., respond to requests quickly. "When we get paged, I will go print the information," said Maive Vasquez, clinical rehabilitation specialist and admissions charge nurse. "Our goal is to increase census, so it's important to bring people in as fast as possible." As an example, Vasquez stated that by using Care Finder-Pro, Rancho Los Amigos received a patient referral in the morning,

and they were able to transfer the patient to their organization that same afternoon.

3. Accelerated placement increases efficiency

Mary Alexander from Home Instead believes that a set discharge planning process is one of the critical elements in reducing readmissions. "If hospitals have a strong home care component they are less likely to be readmitted," Alexander said. "It's really about what's best for the patient and giving them education and information. TLC is doing a great service in that they've really thought about the patient's needs."

A delay in discharge means a delay in admission of a new patient. One hospital profiled by The Advisory Board quantified the time spent between patient assessments, form completion, communication with facilities and payers and finalizing the transfer process. The time per patient reached 665 minutes, or close to 11 hours – nearly one and a half days of work.

Data from an Advisory Board survey indicated that in a majority of hospitals, the need for post-acute care services delays discharge at least 20 to 30 percent of the time. Delayed discharge has been associated with decreased patient satisfaction.

Through Care Finder-Pro, providers receive a report with statistics related to their response to hospital placement requests. Information includes number of requests, number of responses, length of response time and what the hospital wishes in terms of response time (usually 30 minutes). The report also shows activity from a provider's competitors. This data allows providers to adjust their system to be more competitive.

To further increase provider efficiency, TLC offers business intelligence reporting with performance and market information. TLC's Family Programs are educational online tools that inform, educate and involve a patient's family in choosing a post-acute care provider.

Post-acute care providers receive a report showing the number of hits to their company’s website via TLC’s Family Program website, along with the number of referrals each month and for the past 12 months.

4. Web-based tools benefit providers and patients

The Nebraska Health Care Association is a professional association with a membership of most of the state’s nursing facilities and assisted living facilities, more than 400 in total. NHCA has endorsed TLC’s programs and sees the benefits of a web-based discharge program. Heath Boddy, NHCA Executive Director, notes that, “Technology certainly is becoming an integral part of health care at all levels and in an ever-growing number of facets, such as admissions, medical records, pharmacy, etc. We have received positive feedback on TLC’s tools from discharge planners, and the fact that TLC’s Facility Finder includes all licensed facilities in the country gives the system more value to the consumer.”

Some electronic discharge programs require providers to subscribe (pay) for access to service. “Other hospitals that use electronic discharge companies who charge providers to participate limit patient choice to only those who ‘pay to play’ and are not endorsed by NHCA,” Boddy added. “Participation in TLC’s program for a long-term care provider is as easy as sending a simple fax identifying basic information about your facility and then receiving your referrals.”

The Arizona Health Care Association takes pride in being the state’s largest professional long term care association and advocacy organization representing skilled nursing facilities and assisted living communities. Arizona’s member facilities care for more than 10,000 of the state’s elderly citizens.

Both the Nebraska and Arizona associations embedded TLC’s Facility Finder and My Care Report programs on their websites. According to Arizona’s Executive Director Kathleen Pagels, the association has been very supportive of

TLC’s resources and believes the company’s programs are good tools for consumers visiting their website.

“TLC is a comprehensive program designed to meet the needs of all the end users of long term care – providers, hospitals and consumers,” Pagels said. “We think TLC is providing leadership in positive care outcomes.”

Mary Alexander from Home Instead agrees, “I think TLC is positioned at the right place, especially considering everything going on with Medicare and hospital reimbursement penalties. TLC could be the answer for operational efficiencies and financial savings, but also a valuable tool for the consumer...so everybody wins.”

Traditional Placement vs. Web-Enabled Placement

Element	Traditional Placement	Web-Enabled Placement
Provider Interaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » PAC provider “cherry picks” patients according to profitable payer source » Hospital lacks central information on historical patient acceptance, unable to generate acceptance pressure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Program generates reports by post-acute provider, tracking number and payer source of all referrals » Referral tracking gives hospital leverage to negotiate for increased acceptance of difficult patients
Data Communicability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Variety of forms required across various agencies create duplicative administrative work » Handwritten documents often illegible or incomplete 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Required forms automatically populated by hospital computer system, updated simultaneously » Forms legible, drop-down menus ensure completeness – minimizing calls between providers
Information Transfer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Multiple faxes required to make contact, find suitable match for patient » HIPAA compliance concerns due to faxed information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Streamlined information transfer, multiple inquiries sent through single click » Electronic information transfer mechanism HIPAA compliant
Process Efficiency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Inefficient contact methods create delays, frustration » Delays in discharge up to three to four days 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » All hospital-based information transmitted electronically » Response time from subscribers as quick as two minutes
Patient, Family Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Variable processes to allow family input into facility selection » Process often lacks adequate information, support tools to aid family decision 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Family can take virtual tour for as many facilities as desired » More convenient, standardized process creates less stress, allows for more equitable comparison

Source: The Advisory Board Company

