

# Alegent Health - Omaha, Nebraska

## Executive Summary

Alegent Health, the largest not-for-profit, faith-based health-care system in Nebraska and southwestern Iowa installed Care Finder-Pro® transitional care program in their largest medical center, Bergan Mercy Medical Center (BMMC), a 290 bed full-service health-care provider. During the year-long program, length of stay, family satisfaction, staff satisfaction, time per discharge, and post-acute care provider participation were measured.

Results were very positive. Length of Stay was reduced 0.18 days for patients discharged to post-acute providers, Family and Staff Satisfaction increased, Time per Discharge was reduced by 10 minutes per case, and provider participation was excellent resulting in a median response time of less than 30 minutes.

Additional benefits were realized by Alegent Health from comprehensive management reports that led to increased revenues for Alegent Health's Home Care Services, improved communication to Alegent Health's nursing home network and independent homes, and objective measurement of performance and compliance.

## Goals/Problem Statement

Alegent Health's goals were to reduce length of stay (LOS) at its five Metro Medical Centers to improve financial return, and to maintain or improve Family/Patient and Staff Satisfaction while reducing the LOS. In some instances, the pressures to reduce LOS result in a corresponding decrease in Satisfaction.

The Alegent Health Home Care Services division was interested in increasing its share in the Omaha market. One of the issues was how to learn about patients discharged to home needing home health on a timely basis. There is a window of opportunity immediately

after discharge to home where Home Care Services marketing is the most effective.

## Previous Options

There were various initiatives in place aimed at reducing length of stay; however, none included patient education and choice in post-acute care settings prior to admission. Discharge activities consisted primarily of telephoning and faxing paper-based records in search of post-acute care providers who could accept patients.

Another Alegent Health facility, Immanuel Medical Center had previously installed an electronic discharge system, but this system was ineffective, expensive and rarely used. It was not considered applicable for Bergan-Mercy.

Alegent Health's Home Care Services' existing method to learn about patients discharged to home needing home health was to establish personal relationships with hospital discharge personnel. This resulted in inconsistent information flow to the Home Care Services' personnel.

Family/Patient satisfaction had not included any post-hospital education prior to admission.

BMMC used a decentralized discharge system where Social Workers assigned to units completed the discharges of patients in that unit. The case per Social Worker ratio was the highest in the Alegent Health system. Ways to alleviate the heavy case load were being considered.

Post-acute care provider participation and response performance were not measured. They were subjectively determined by the staff involved with the discharge process.

## Care Finder-Pro Solution

**Benefit 1 – Customized Software** – Care Finder-Pro was customized for ease of use by the discharge team.

“Customizing the program for Bergan Mercy was a great way to help transition the discharge planning team from paper to electronic. Having forms and using terminology that we knew eliminated much of the anxiety normally associated with a new system.”

*Sherri Frey-Gomez, MSW  
 Lead Medical Social Worker, Alegent Health*

**Benefit 2 – Discharge at Admissions/Community Service** – Two online consumer programs were embedded in Alegent Health’s Web site, branded to Alegent Health, and offered free to families prior to admission.

The benefits realized by BMMC included:

- An increase in Family/Patient education and satisfaction as one out of six or 17 percent of patients being discharged to a post-acute facility had used the consumer tools embedded in Alegent Health’s Web site.

	SEP	DEC	12 MOS TOTAL
Number of My Care Report/ Facility Finder Hits	23	25	333
Number of Patient Cases	140	109	1,954
Percentage Using My Care Report/ Facility Finder	16.43%	22.94%	17.02%

- A Community Service benefit as “hits” to the free online programs by families was more than 8,000.

**Benefit 3 – Post-Acute Provider Participation** – Nearly all of the 436 post-acute care providers in Nebraska participated in the Care Finder-Pro program. The resulting benefits to BMMC included the following:

- Discharge planners had available all post-acute care providers in Nebraska to find an appropriate bed.

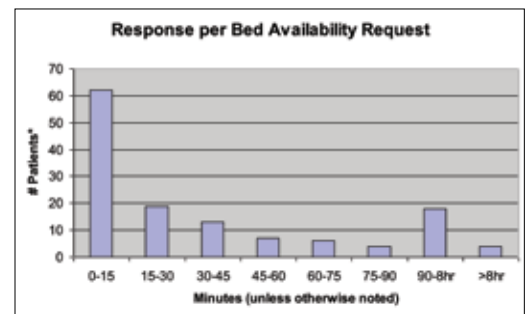
- Patient choice of providers was maximized as all post-acute providers participated in the program.
- Competition among providers resulted in fast turn-around to “bed availability” requests, and a reduction in Time per Discharge and reduction in length of stay.

### **Benefit 4 – Automated Discharge/Simultaneous Multiple Provider Contact**

– The teamwork established between BMMC’s discharge planners and the post-acute providers resulted in median time responses of 30 minutes or less for each month of the program. A typical distribution is shown below and in general, about 45 percent of responses were in the first 15 minutes and 60 percent were in the first 30 minutes from receipt of the “Bed availability request” from Bergan Mercy Medical Center.

Alegent Health had various length of stay initiatives in process during the time that Care Finder-Pro was in use at the Bergan Mercy Medical Center. It was not possible to attribute specific benefits or problems to the change in length of stay; however, based on the positive results from patient involvement in Discharge at Admissions, reduction in time per discharge, and rapid response from post-acute providers, it is clear that Care Finder-Pro had a positive contribution to the LOS reduction of 0.18 days experienced during the one-year program.

Prior to adopting Care Finder-Pro BMMC estimated an average of 40 minutes per discharge. With a 30 minute response time from the Care Finder-Pro program, a savings of 10 minutes per discharge was realized.



**Benefit 5 – Alegent Health Home Care Services Lead Generation**—Daily information from the Care Finder-Pro multiple report system was available to Home Care Services personnel allowing them to approach families for services during the short window of opportunity needed to close the sale.

to involve patients and families in the discharge process.

Use of the consumer tools were recorded by the Alegent Health Information Services department and matched against patients who were discharged to a post-acute setting.

“The monthly reports provided by Care Finder-Pro are a great aid to managing referrals to both network and other nursing homes in the area. The daily reports allow us to maximize our auxiliary services to nursing homes in a way previously unattainable.”

*Denise McNitt, RN, MS - Chief Nursing Executive  
 Home Care & Hospice Services  
 Alegent Health Home Care Services*

**Post-Acute Care Provider Participation** – The Nebraska Health Care Association representing the State’s nursing homes and assisted living centers endorsed Care Finder-Pro and actively participated in gathering the detailed information necessary for BMMC discharge planners to instantly identify those providers who met the quality of care needs and quality of life wants of their patients.

## Implementation

**Customized Software** - Thirty days prior to installation, a series of events took place with the purpose being to ease the transition from paper to automation for the discharge planners (case managers and social workers) who would use the program. The major events included:

- A Total Living Choices (TLC) consulting team shadowed the case managers and social workers to learn first-hand the practices currently in place.
- Based on the findings of the shadowing, the Care Finder-Pro program was customized to BMMC for ease of use by the discharge planning team.
- Both group and individual training were completed.

**Discharge at Admissions/Community Service** - Two online consumer programs developed by Total Living Choices, My Care Report (educational tool) and Facility Finder™ (search tool), were developed to be easily embedded in Web sites. The tools were embedded in Alegent Health’s Web site and branded to them ([www.alegenthealth.org/body.cfm?id=2118](http://www.alegenthealth.org/body.cfm?id=2118)).



Community service brochures announcing the free consumer programs were handed out at physician clinics and other locations

“Nearly 100 percent of the 436 members of the Nebraska Health Care Association participated with Bergan Mercy and Care Finder-Pro.

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.”

*Brendon Polt, Atty, MBA  
 Assistant Executive Director - Nebraska Health Care Association*

Monthly reports were generated and sent electronically to each post-acute care provider with market and performance information allowing them to adjust their system to be more competitive.

**Automated Discharge/Simultaneous Multiple Provider Contact** - Based on the results of the consulting work performed prior to installation, it was determined that both an online and fax interface with the Care Finder-Pro program was required. The physical layout of the Bergan Mercy Medical Center is such that the discharge planners’ offices are a distance away from the patients’ floors and medical records. Access to computers at the nurses’ stations was limited; however, fax machines were always available.

Care Finder-Pro allows, interchangeably, entry into the program online or by fax. This resulted in little wasted time by the discharge planners as they were able to access the program at various places throughout the hospital.

Bed availability requests were sent electronically, simultaneously, to all post-acute providers selected by the discharge planners. Every licensed post-acute provider in the USA is included in the Care Finder-Pro system. If the discharge planner was unsure which post-acute providers could meet the requirements of the patient (e.g. for a difficult discharge to a location outside of the immediate Omaha market area), the Care Finder-Pro system located the appropriate providers and displayed them to the discharge planner.

the Alegent Health Web site and branded to Alegent Health. 17 percent of patients discharged to post-acute care providers had used the free online programs.

- Staff satisfaction increased as Care Finder-Pro became “indispensable” to the discharge planning staff.
- Median response time from providers to requests for “Bed Availability” was less than 30 minutes.
- Post-acute care providers responding was greater than 70 percent.

“Allowing entry into Care Finder-Pro both online and by fax helped in the early acceptance of the program, and the automatic scanning of medical documents rather than cutting and pasting reduced our clerical work. We have social workers who ‘live’ for the program.”

*Nancy Pares, RN, BSN*

*Quality Care Management Manager - Alegent Health Bergan Mercy Medical Center*

***Alegent Health Home Care Services Lead Generation*** – There is a short window of opportunity after a patient is discharged home for Alegent Health Home Care Services to contact the family, describe the service benefits, and reach agreement. Lead generation had been through personal contact with discharge planners when time permitted.

A daily report was generated from the Care Finder-Pro multiple report system and emailed to Home Care Service personnel providing them with the information necessary to efficiently plan their sales activity.

## Summary

Care Finder-Pro is a transitional care program that unites hospital, patients, and post-acute care providers in a way that all three participants receive benefits. The whole of the transitional care solution is only as strong as the weakest link.

At the Alegent Health Bergan Mercy Medical Center, Care Finder-Pro allowed the three groups to interact in an efficient way contributing to the following benefits for BMMC, patients, and post-acute providers:

- Length of stay was reduced by 0.18 days for discharges to post-acute providers.
- Resulted in 148 days saved.
- Time per discharge was reduced on average by 10 minutes per case with major savings in complicated cases.
- Family Satisfaction increased due to free access to online educational (My Care Report) and search (Facility Finder) programs embedded in

## ***Participating Organizations***

***Alegent Health*** - Alegent Health is the largest not-for-profit, faith-based health-care system in Nebraska and southwestern Iowa. It focuses on caring for patients through all of life’s phases - while emphasizing prevention, wellness and health education. Alegent Health includes nine acute care hospitals, more than 100 sites of service, more than 1,300 physicians on its medical staff and roughly 9,000 employees. Alegent Health is sponsored by Catholic Health Initiatives and Immanuel Health Systems.

***American Health Care Association*** - The American Health Care Association (AHCA) is a non-profit federation of affiliated state health organizations, together representing more than 10,000 non-profit and for-profit assisted living, nursing facility, developmentally-disabled and sub-acute care providers that care for more than 1.5 million elderly and disabled individuals nationally. AHCA represents the long term care community to the nation at large – to government, business leaders, and the general public. It also serves as a force for change within the long term care field, providing information, education, and administrative tools that enhance quality at every level.

***Nebraska Health Care Association*** - The Nebraska Health Care Association is a nonprofit trade association representing more than 435 long term health-care facilities in Nebraska. Its affiliate, the Nebraska Assisted Living Association (NALA), represents assisted living facilities. The activities of the Licensed Practical Nurse Association of Nebraska (LPNAN) are managed by NHCA staff.

***Total Living Choices*** - Total Living Choices is a health-care enterprise software developer of transitional care programs that unite hospitals, patients, and post-acute providers resulting in financial and satisfaction benefits. Total Living Choices also develops Web-based tools that provide living solutions for older Americans unable to continue living in their home.