Pediatric home health specialists lean on technology for growth and outcomes

CEO Darcie Peacock tells how

When Darcie Peacock, BSW, MS, OTR/L, joined Denver-based Solace Pediatric Home Healthcare in 2012 as an occupational therapist and social worker, the organization was reliant on technology but not truly automated. The administration had already attempted a move to an EMR system; when it was abandoned, the staff had to go back to their old way of doing things manually.

“We were relying on ourselves to keep up with all the changing regulations and then update our documents and processes around that,” she recalls. “We needed to get on a technology system that we could lean on to manage processes and changing regulations.”

After the experience of investing heavily in an EMR and fully training clinicians had been a bust, the Solace administration was hesitant to try again. But Peacock had a plan and quickly discovered that Brightree needed to be in it.

**Challenge**

In 2012, the clinicians at Solace worked on bulky laptops and would fill out their documentation on templated Word documents, which would be sent in every week and then manually moved into folders on a drive for patient files. Everything – including timeliness of re-certifications and medication orders – was tracked in one massive Excel document that was so big it would crash almost daily.

As an example of the manual processes, Peacock points out that there was one person dedicated to copying from the clinician’s documentation and pasting it into a 485 document.

Compounding the challenges of frequent regulatory changes from CMS, pediatrics is a unique market because much of the regulations don’t apply to the pediatric population.

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Darcie Peacock, Solace Pediatric Home Healthcare

For instance, the new COPs require that organizations give information to every patient, even children, about the Center on Aging and Disability in the community that they live.

“It’s a very crafty line that we walk in trying to meet regulations but also meet the need of our patients,” states Peacock. “We need layers of flexibility within the system in order to manipulate some of our processes but also walk the thin line of meeting pediatric regulations.”

**Solution**

After evaluating several vendor solutions, the Solace administration was attracted to both the robustness and the flexibility of the Brightree Home Health & Hospice solution, according to Peacock.

“We’re not extremely nursing focused, but many of the systems are built around nursing and then therapy is sort of supplemented,” she suggests. “When we first looked at the Brightree system, we felt it had a solid therapy platform so that our clinicians would not be frustrated trying to fit a round peg into a square hole.”

So for instance, the Brightree solution enables Solace to adapt regular adult evaluations into pediatric templates that address specific pediatric questions.

**The results**

- **Improve outcomes**
  - Reduces ACH accreditation deficiencies by 40%
  - Eliminates manual processes to focus on care

- **Facilitate growth**
  - Supports growth from 15 clinicians to 150
  - Meets constantly changing regulations

- **Increase clinician satisfaction**
  - Accommodates therapy focus
  - Eliminates complaints from staff

- **Strengthen physician relationship**
  - Reduces frustration with call backs
  - Heightens efficiency
“Brightree allows us to take another piece of manual process off of our clinicians, so they can just focus on treating the kiddos and not have to deal with added layers,” Peacock affirms.

And most importantly to her job as CEO, the Brightree system maintains everything an organization needs in one spot.

“With Brightree, our entire business lives in one system – from the clinical documentation to the document tracking to the revenue cycle – and I think that is worth more than anything,” states Peacock. She also adds that Brightree is constantly reinvesting and innovating to make the platform even more robust.

For instance, a new eFax solution provides functionality for inbound and outbound faxing of documents within the document management workflow. These include documents such as verbal orders, plan of care, certification of terminal illness (CTI), discharge summaries, transfer summaries and plan of care summary. Additionally, those documents that require signature can be faxed to the agency and become part of the patient record.

As a beta partner for this new faxing solution, Peacock is excited to eliminate yet another manual process. The organization has roughly 15,000 documents currently coming in and out in any month and the process has been to download and upload these documents and then find which patient it belongs to. With the new process, she anticipates saving on labor and reallocating those resources to make a bigger impact on the care of their pediatric patients.

“When you lean on technology, you have greater accuracy and you can also solve workforce issues,” she notes. “In Denver, the job market is extremely tight, and it doesn’t make sense to pay someone a high wage to essentially download documents for eight hours a day.”

Peacock notes that the organization currently has three full time LPNs in the office to call and get orders and med lists ahead of time so that the field clinicians don’t have to do that on their first visit. As she looks to hire more LPNs, she’s reassured that the Brightree solution can accommodate that growth.

“Last year we grew by 40% and two years before that we grew by 60%, so we’re just constantly growing and that, of course, means we’re constantly hiring,” says Peacock. “And we’re able to be more strategic about our growth and lean on the technology from Brightree rather than trying to battle the job market when hiring new people and training them.”

Results

When Solace was first accredited as a home health organization through ACH, the organization had 20 deficiencies. After being on Brightree a little over a year – and growing from 15 clinicians to over 60 at the time – those deficiencies dropped to 12.

And after another enormous growth spurt to more than 150 clinicians and a patient census over 2,200, Peacock is happy to report that deficiencies dropped to 11 during the 2018 survey.

“I know that the reason we made such improvements despite such massive growth was because the Brightree system keeps all the regulations in check,” she explains. “All of those processes are built into the system to meet those regulations and requirements.”

Clinician satisfaction is another result that is key to the growth of the organization. At Solace, Peacock reports that she never hears complaints about Brightree from her clinicians because they enjoy using the easy and smooth interface of the iPad app. Additionally, top-notch support from Brightree ensures that any issues are quickly identified and resolved.

With solutions such as the new faxing solution, Peacock also expects referring source satisfaction to escalate as well because the partnership with physicians will be strengthened. Referring physicians won’t be frustrated, she says, by calls asking for orders or other documents that they’ve already sent back but are stuck in the fax queue.

“As any CEO knows, moving systems can be extremely painful, so it’s important to get on one that can grow and evolve with your organization,” states Peacock. “And I’m confident that Brightree will continue to do that for us.”