

# Getting the technology right removes all barriers to success for rural agency

Hospice of Okeechobee's Gail Gerstrup tells how



When Gail Gerstrup arrived at Hospice of Okeechobee in Okeechobee, Florida, she knew job one as CEO was to get the small, rural agency off of paper and onto some type of EMR. With a background in nursing, she also knew how to tread into this territory.

*"I had come from some hospice and product nightmares, so I knew from those previous experiences what we needed to avoid," explains Gerstrup. "And as a clinician, I knew what the team needed to take the best care of our patients."*

## The challenge:

### round-the-clock charting in good times and in bad

In addition to finding a hospice system that documented the way clinicians need it to, one of the biggest challenges for Hospice of Okeechobee was a system that accommodated round-the-clock charting for the agency's inpatient hospice unit.

*"We are unique because we don't just need documentation for home visits," says Gerstrup. "We have routine, respite and inpatient care for patients here in residence, so our nurses and CNAs chart 24 x 7. We needed a workflow design that could differentiate between the lines of service within one location."*

And, because the agency sits in the center of Florida's Hurricane Alley, tropical storm season presents an especially precarious time for patient safety, heightening the need for a highly available system.

## The solution: removing the barriers

When Gerstrup first began entertaining Brightree Hospice as an EMR of choice, she was struck by how the system didn't have a home health feel to it like other hospice products on the market.

*"This system is light, it's portable, it's easy to use, it's logical, and it hits all the bases as far as your compliances and timeliness issues, all of those barriers or excuses that you've encountered in the past with clinicians."*

**Gail Gerstrup, CEO, Hospice of Okeechobee**

*"Brightree's solution was straightforward hospice, and that was huge for me," she recalls. "I didn't see any of the complicating factors that I had seen in other products."*

Instead, she saw the stability of the product platform and lots of advantages including taking the laptop to rural home visits, where her clinicians could chart and then return to the agency to sync, and do the same for patients in residence.

Additionally, Gerstrup was impressed with the logical progression of the assessment workflow, taking clinician users where they needed to go as they delved deeper into the data for accurate and accelerated documentation. She also was certain her clinicians would feel comfortable with the documentation sequencing because it followed the way nurses actually document.

*"You want your nurses to like what they're doing; it's a retention factor," suggest Gerstrup. "You want them to have something that they feel comfortable and confident with. This system does that for you. It's light, it's portable, it's easy to use, it's logical, and it hits all the bases as far as your compliance and timeliness issues, all of those barriers or excuses that you've encountered in the past with clinicians."*

Another factor that has impressed Gerstrup from the start is Brightree's ability to anticipate market and regulatory

## The results

**Reduce costs** 15% decrease

- Reduce paper costs
- Reduce charting overtime

**Increase compliance**



- Achieve Hospice Honors Elite in 2015, 2017 & 2018
- Score between 100% and 97% on most screenings

**Advance outcomes**



- Improve accuracy and speed of documentation
- Create high availability during disasters

**Streamline workflows**



- Simplify workflows from referral to billing
- Provide round-the-clock charting

**Increase satisfaction**



- Improve clinician retention
- Increase clinician time with patients

*"I couldn't ask for anything better because whatever regulatory mandate there is, Brightree is already ahead of it for us."* **Gail Gerstrup**, CEO, Hospice of Okeechobee

changes – from the latest iPad technology to emergency preparedness readiness.

In 2017, Hospice of Okeechobee rolled out Brightree Hospice on iPads for charting, which allows clinicians to dictate and take pictures of wounds or anything else that needs to be documented.

*"Nurses always have the iPad with them now, and I would hate to think what would happen if I tried to take them away,"* jokes Gerstrup. *"They are so attached to them, and it's just second nature because of the way it's designed. They also love that it doesn't create a barrier with the patient."*

Those laptops proved essential during 2017's Hurricane Irma, when Hospice of Okeechobee withstood four-and-a-half days of sheltered care during the natural disaster with no interruptions in the care to the patients in the facility. Despite a loss of electricity and of the Wifi provider, the agency staff used a generator to restore power and hotspots on their cellphones to synch their iPads.

*"We didn't have one moment of lag or interruption in our documentation,"* states Gerstrup. *"It was really the greatest thing because I had plenty of other things to worry about. I didn't have the headache of pulling out papers and sorting through which documents we were going to need if the system went down or if we couldn't use the iPads. Instead, we were able to operate as usual and without having that concern."*

That kind of peace of mind goes a long way for Gerstrup when it comes to knowing that Brightree is keeping up with her needs for the emergency preparedness rule or any other regulatory requirements. For example, she says that on any given day she's able to look at disaster triage reports from the system to see who her current patients are, whether they're to go to shelter or need oxygen set up at home. And when it comes to CAP reports, she's able to download the report from the system with no extra effort at all.

*"We know that somebody is always looking at the product and always keeping it current,"* Gerstrup explains. *"I couldn't ask for anything better because whatever*

*regulatory mandate there is, Brightree is already ahead of it for us."*

## **The results: transforming patient care**

Gerstrup has never looked back at the decision to partner with Brightree because it has proven to be just the product the agency needed. And while she's looking forward to recently rolled out features including mileage auto calculations and an expanded dashboard, Brightree Hospice has already made its mark on the agency's bottom line with productivity gains and overtime savings, but most importantly, improvements to the quality of care.

After moving from laptops to iPads, Gerstrup has seen her overtime due to charting drop from 20% to 5% because it's now completed during the visit. Additionally, the agency is prepared for audits because of the robustness of Brightree reporting.

*"I had a Department of Labor auditor come visit with me a few years ago who wanted data on a specific demographic group of patients we admitted,"* relays Gerstrup. *"It could have been a nightmare to manually review time records, log sheets and patient charts, but I was able to pull two Brightree reports and have the hours of nursing service this group of patients received."*

Providing quality care to the Okeechobee community is by far the greatest achievement, says Gerstrup, and the agency has shown its exceptional care by earning Hospice Honors Elite for three years.

*"We take great pride in doing good work,"* she reflects. *"We're neighbors taking care of neighbors and those CAHP and HIS scores are reflective of that relationship we have with our community."*

*"But it's also reflective of getting the technology right,"* Gerstrup continues. *"We have to do everything the big guys do in terms of providing all the same services and meeting the same standards as all hospice agencies. Brightree Hospice is one of the more meaningful tools that allows us to do that. From start to finish — from referral all the way through to billing — this product gets it right."*



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