Gaining Efficiency

AND ACHIEVING

Better Patient Care

IN THE AGE OF

Healthcare Reform

How government and economics are redefining IT support for mobile devices

Many factors are influencing the remaking of America's healthcare system. As forces of reform at the federal level converge with healthcare providers' efforts to reduce costs, and improve the overall quality of patient care, the demands placed on IT helpdesk professionals supporting these organizations are changing. This paper explores the drivers of healthcare transformation, identifies the shortcomings of current IT support offerings, and provides a look at how forward-thinking health systems are staying ahead of the curve by anticipating the support needs of tomorrow's healthcare system.

A Brave New World

HEALTHCARE COSTS CONTINUE to rise rapidly in the United States. According to Plunkett Research, Ltd., a Houston-based industry research firm, total U.S. healthcare expenditures are projected to increase from $2.39 trillion in 2008 to $2.72 trillion in 2010, with annual increases averaging about seven percent.

Plunkett estimates that federal spending on Medicaid and Medicare accounted for approximately 21.9 percent of all federal government expenditures as of 2007. With health spending in the U.S. hovering around 16.5 percent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2008—and expected to rise to 19.6 percent by 2016—the government has begun taking drastic measures to reign in healthcare related costs.

Caught between a rock and a hard place, healthcare providers are struggling to satisfy regulatory mandates while competing with one another for patients. Increasingly, their efforts to cut costs and bolster efficiencies to improve quality of care are leading them to adopt technological solutions.

Modern Means Mobile

AMONG THOSE HEALTH CARE organizations leading the charge are the ones who manage to do more with less—and mobile point of care technologies, including notebook computers, smartphones, PDAs and mobile clinical assistants, are making it possible. They also enable optimization of workflows that drive efficiency, improve collaboration among staff for faster decision turnaround, and can help improve quality of care, as well as patient and staff satisfaction.

With so much to gain, the healthcare industry is declaring its love for mobility, implementing a host of mobile devices across the board in an effort to stretch limited resources. Hospital IT departments are well aware of this mobile divide, as more and more clinicians and care givers move off the local area network to provide their expertise.

According to a March 2009 report published by the Aberdeen Group, entitled "More Mobility - Less Budget: Enterprise Strategies in the Current Economic Downturn," enterprise demand for mobility has remained steady, or even increased, despite the global slowdown. Alas, budgets for mobility initiatives have not. Best-in-Class organizations—those performing in the top 20 percent across multiple metrics—are managing to maintain or increase their level of mobility support while their budgets are being cut, says the Boston-based research firm.

Mobility Demands Mobile Support

FOR HOSPITALS AND MEDICAL CENTERS striving to stay ahead of the curve—such as Saint Luke's Health System in Kansas City, Mo., Edinburg, Texas-based Palm Valley Health Care, or Orange Regional Medical Center in Middletown, N.Y.—arming clinicians and caregivers with mobile devices has proven instrumental to stretching resources and improving the quality of care they provide.

But these same devices that liberate health care providers pose a unique challenge to IT helpdesk professionals as they strive to meet their own standards for support: reacting quickly
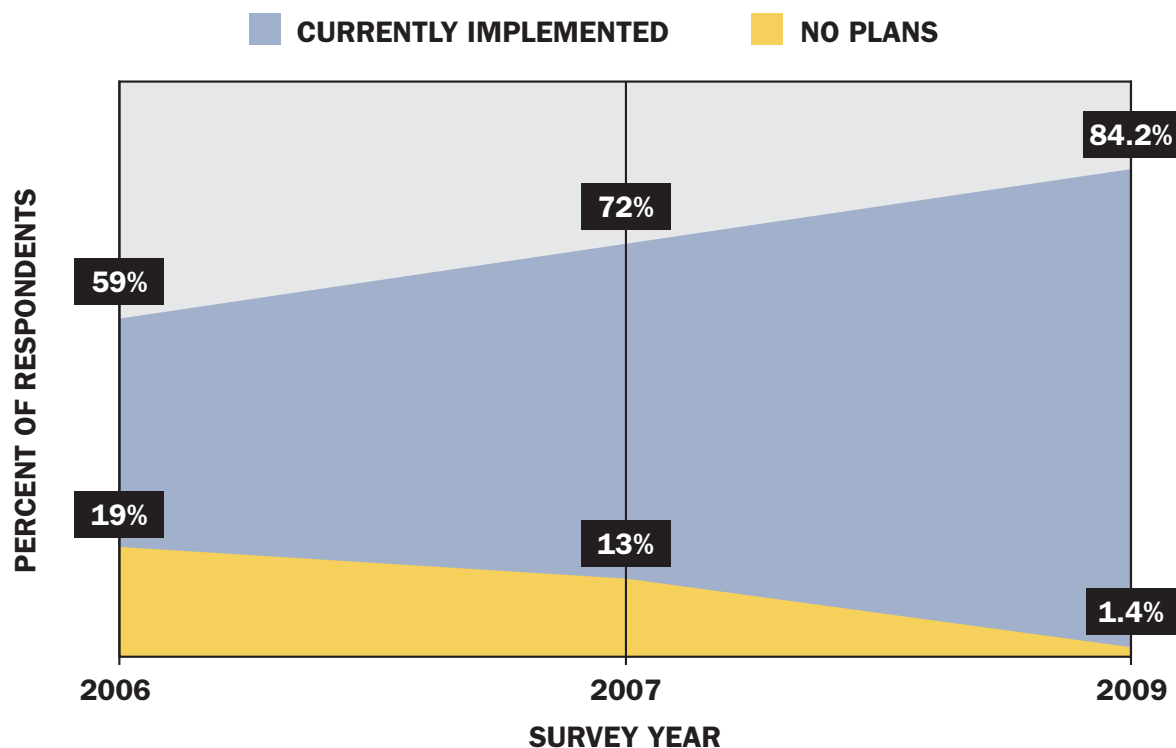
→ **Health care expenditures are projected to increase from $2.39 trillion in 2008 to $2.72 trillion in 2010, with annual increases averaging about seven percent.**
– Plunkett Research, Ltd.

in high-pressure situations; staying focused on the patient experience; enabling a productive workforce; embracing and supporting professional mobility; and, supporting geographically distributed organizations.

Extending care beyond the hospital walls means supporting increasingly mobile healthcare providers who are no longer

MOBILITY INITIATIVES OVER TIME

CURRENTLY IMPLEMENTED **NO PLANS**

PERCENT OF RESPONDENTS

84.2%

72%

59%

19%

13%

1.4%

2006   2007   2009

SURVEY YEAR

joined by a local area network. For the IT helpdesk, problems quickly multiply when users are running on a variety of different laptops or mobile devices, when they may—or may not—have a dynamic IP address, and when they are working behind different firewalls.

The constant challenge IT helpdesk professionals face is to deliver real-time support without having to escalate the service call to the next level. In healthcare, getting this right can mean the difference between life and death. Congress and the Administration are already carrying out requirements included in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009. With HHS Secretary Kathleen Sebelius having announced her picks for the HIT Policy and HIT Standards Committees in mid-May, and venture capital firms like the Psilos Group voicing their optimism for health IT investment going forward, all indicators point to an emerging healthcare system in which the need for top-notch mobile support will be paramount.

Helpdesks need to be sure they have the remote support infrastructure in place to service the kinds of mobile and handheld devices in circulation. Unfortunately, the remote access legacy tools available—including Windows RDP, VNC and pcAnywhere—come up short for a number of reasons, perhaps because they were built for individuals requiring remote access, not helpdesk professionals.

While all three solutions offer remote control/access to a PC, they were designed to allow users to share a desktop, not to provision remote support or to diagnose technology problems.

Legacy offerings cannot reach remote users off the LAN efficiently and tend to offer unreliable connections. They also have problems connecting to devices behind firewalls, in some cases requiring the user to punch a hole in the firewall to allow connectivity—hardly a sound security policy, especially in healthcare settings. In addition, dynamic IP addresses can present a problem for older tools, which require the support technician to know the IP address of the remote machine.

And these legacy tools only address PCs; they cannot help users with mobile devices.

Even IT staff performing their absolute best under this scenario are forced to resign themselves to the limitations of their tools: it takes longer to establish a remote session, assuming a connection can be made at all; service calls take longer; the issue won't get resolved on the first call; employees and customers will become frustrated; the helpdesk is less efficient than it should be. In the final analysis: legacy tools limit the helpdesk's effectiveness for end-user issue resolution because they do not offer the functionality of a true remote support tool, nor do they address the growing need for on-the-fly mobile support.

A Better Way

THE UNPRECEDENTED LEVEL OF attention focused on the promise of HIT—coupled with the healthcare industry's need to mobilize its workforce for the sake of cost reductions, efficiency gains and improved patient care—is pressuring IT professionals charged with supporting health care organizations to look beyond legacy solutions for more robust remote support tools.

Clearly, a more useful tool to IT staff would be one built specifically for the helpdesk. One that enables IT to solve more issues with fewer resources, thereby slashing department costs. For the technician, this could mean a tool that offers console maps to support workflow, handling multiple sessions at one time, and advanced capabilities, such as scripting, system diagnostics, collaboration and chat.

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A true remote support tool would enhance IT support with routing, reporting and customer surveys, and integrate with helpdesk software, including CRM and ticketing systems. The right tool for the job would also enable IT staff to quickly access and troubleshoot issues from users directly on or off LAN, to traverse firewalls without relying on the corporate VPN, and to deliver real-time support to mobile devices and smartphone users.

When Saint Luke's Health System, a regional health care system with 11 hospitals and a number of physician practices serving patients throughout the Kansas City, Mo., area, was having difficulty ensuring round-the-clock support to its 12,000 IT end-users, systems engineer Travis Crain decided to investigate a remote helpdesk solution.

Crain's 30-person desktop support team oversees more than 6,000 desktops and laptops, running over 100 applications for everything from ordering prescriptions, to patient medical records, to accounting. Averaging 900 support calls per month, Crain knows his team couldn't possibly deliver the level of support needed without having the ability to access systems remotely.

Since adopting remote support, Saint Luke's has cited increases in first-call resolution, reduction in the number of outstanding issues, and shortened time to handle those issues. In order to reach remote systems and mobile devices without requiring pre-installed software, the helpdesk is using LogMeIn Rescue to deliver remote support for PCs, Macs and smartphones over the Web.

The organization also has improved overall efficiency and end-user satisfaction by taking advantage of Rescue's scripting capabilities, which they have used to automate a number of routine tasks, such as remote printer installation. Since most of the support calls Crain's group fields involve problems accessing an application, the team uses Rescue to resolve nearly 100 percent of such calls. In addition, the applications that Crain's team supports often require access to confidential patient information, so they must be sure to adhere to HIPAA policies. By using Rescue to capture and store chat logs and videos of support sessions, the IT support group helps meet Saint Luke's audit tracking requirements.

But Crain isn't the only healthcare IT professional sold on Rescue's mobile workforce-friendly support tools. Since the latest release of Rescue, which added instant chat capability, so a user can begin a discussion with a technician before granting remote control of his or her machine—and the simultaneous announcement of BlackBerry support for Rescue+Mobile—an increasing number of the company's 70,000 customers are emerging from the healthcare field.

Edinburg, Texas-based Palm Valley Health Care is a good example. As one of the first healthcare providers in the area to implement an electronic medical records (EMR) system, Palm Valley Health Care's goal was to enable nurses to spend more quality time with patients and, by going paperless, to increase the efficiency of the medical billing and reimbursement process. As part of the EMR deployment, Palm Valley provided its field nurses with remote access to the EMR system via wireless pocket PCs. Instead of writing down data and traveling to the office to re-enter it into the computer, the nurses rely on these mobile devices to access their daily schedules and to record patient assessments, including vital signs and other data. This information synchs up with the company's centralized servers immediately, for a quick and efficient billing process that allows the company to shorten the medical reimbursement cycle.

To ensure the efficiency of their EMR program, Palm Valley Health Care first had to minimize software-related disruption of the nurses' PDA devices. The organization also needed to slash the time IT administrators spent helping non-technical users over the phone, or going to branch offices for service

calls. Before adopting Rescue+Mobile, IT administrator Nathan Armstrong says he would have to travel out to a field location, walk nurses through software issues over the phone, or have them bring their pocket PCs into the office.

Now, if a nurse experiences a problem with a mobile device in the field, Armstrong and his team can resolve the problem remotely and quickly, allowing the nurse to stay in the patient's home and continue with the care-giving visit. The nurse simply types in a PIN code to connect with a technician, who can then see the device's interface on his computer and control it as if it were in his hands.

Remote Support Empowers Training

FOR PALM VALLEY HEALTH CARE and others, the value of LogMeIn's support tools extends beyond simply gaining the ability to troubleshoot remotely and service PCs, laptops and smartphones. On-the-fly remote training is another key advantage the Rescue products deliver. Armstrong credits Rescue+Mobile's training features for being a "big factor" in the increased productivity of the nurses. The same features allow him to train non-technical nurses to make the most of their mobile devices—and to minimize frustration.

He says the product's laser pointer and whiteboard capabilities are very helpful in demonstrating to nurses how to troubleshoot in the future. And the recording tool allows him to show previous support sessions to nurses when they are faced with similar issues.

This training capability also increases the efficiency of the IT department.

Helpdesk operator Jaime McGar agrees. With two hospitals and a number of satellite locations, Orange Regional Medical Center provides inpatient and outpatient care to the people of the Orange County, New York, area. The helpdesk is using Rescue to help increase employee productivity by conducting on–the-fly training and demonstrating solutions to known problems via remote control, whiteboarding and the laser pointer.

And with Rescue, the helpdesk group has been able to increase the number of calls they can resolve without having to escalate to Level Two. McGar credits the remote support tool with slashing 10- to 15-minute phone calls down to three to five minutes, so the helpdesk is now using Rescue on three-quarters of their support calls and helping to boost operational efficiency and employee satisfaction.

Parting Wisdom

WHILE IT'S STILL EARLY TO PROJECT what health reform will bring to the U.S. healthcare system, the agents of change clearly are hard at work. When President Obama released his fiscal year 2010 budget request, he emphasized funding "what works." According to HIMSS, the HHS budget priorities appear to be focused on eliminating waste, while addressing some of the Administration's priorities.

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– Aberdeen Group

Washington has made it abundantly clear that they have high hopes for health IT—and the investment world, views health IT and medical technology as sub-sectors of the healthcare industry rife with opportunity.

At the same time, as Aberdeen Group reminds us: "Enterprise mobility is past the tipping point…the need to keep workers in touch no matter where or when is now a given." This message bears particular relevance at IT helpdesks supporting health care providers, since the need to contain costs, boost operational efficiencies and improve quality of care has become manifest in the proliferation of an ever-expanding selection of mobile devices. Fed up with legacy solutions that fail to provide the tools needed to support an increasingly mobile healthcare workforce, proactive helpdesk professionals are exploring their options.

In choosing the right tool for the job, they are demanding a solution that is purpose built for the helpdesk. One that:

■ Solves more issues with fewer resources, to help reduce costs

■ Provides console maps to support workflow, handling multiple sessions simultaneously

■ Delivers advanced capabilities, such as scripting, system diagnostics, collaboration and chat

■ Empowers IT support with routing, reporting and customer surveys

■ Integrates with helpdesk software such as CRM and ticketing systems

■ Allows technicians to quickly access and troubleshoot issues from users directly, whether on or off the LAN

■ Enables technicians to traverse firewalls without relying on the corporate VPN

■ Provides real-time support to mobile devices and smartphone users

With healthcare stimulus dollars in place to help propel IT implementation, hospitals are better poised to take advantage of solutions that will put them ahead of the curve. IT professionals at hospitals and medical centers—including Saint Luke's Health System, Palm Valley Health Care and Orange Regional Medical Center—have identified a true remote support tool that enables them to do so. By leveraging LogMeIn Rescue, they are eliminating cost, reaping efficiency gains and raising the bar for quality of care. ■

LogMeIn®

LogMeIn Rescue is a secure, web-based help desk and remote support solution that gives support professionals the ability to connect to a remote computer or smartphone without pre-installed software. LogMeIn Rescue works on Windows-based PCs and Macs, as well as mobile devices running Windows Mobile®, Symbian OS™ and BlackBerry®. LogMeIn Rescue allows support organizations to cost-effectively deliver high-touch support, training and educational services to customers, partners and employees.