

Healthcare IT Boom

Finding a need and meeting it

By Sheryl S. Jackson

How does a Harvard MBA with 30 years of experience in major corporations decide to leave his high-level management position to start a new company in healthcare information technology?

Kelvin Buncum MBA explains that he made just such a move after a series of conversations with a friend of his who is a physician. "I've always wanted to be an entrepreneur but I never found the right opportunity until now," he says. He was fascinated by the physician's description of the changes in healthcare and the challenges faced by providers each day. Limits on Medicare reimbursements as well as other insurance payments mean that healthcare providers are constantly looking for ways to improve efficiency.

The unmet needs identified in his conversations with his friend and an opportunity to partner with a software developer formed the basis of his start-up company, International Medical Solutions. The initial product offered by the company addresses these needs in a unique manner.

The Mobile Patient Communicator™ (MPC) is a portable, hand-held touchscreen terminal that gives patients the ability to update their personal profile, sign consent forms and complete necessary paperwork. The information is transmitted to the nursing station so that nurses can let the patient know, through the MPC, when their exam room is ready. If the facility purchases the self-rooming module, the patient is notified by the MPC that the room is ready and a digital map that guides the patient directly to the room is displayed.

Another efficiency offered by the MPC is the extensive health information and videos related to their condition or that day's visit that can be viewed by the patient in the waiting room. Pre- and post-tests, along with questions imbedded in the material, document the patient's comprehension of the material. Nurses and physicians can review the results immediately to identify which areas might need more explanation. "The MPC will also automatically review the material if a question is answered incorrectly," adds Buncum.

Initially, Buncum planned the personal records update and education modules, but the self-rooming module was developed after he began working with a provider that was testing the device. "Typically, a nurse walks to the exam room to call a patient and lead them to the exam room," he explains. This frees some of the nurse's time to finish paperwork or complete preparations for the next patient.

The MPC offers a technological answer to many problems faced by healthcare providers, says Buncum. Staff members' productivity increases, so costs are lower and a more efficient registration process decreases wait times. "We also found that consumers want more control of their healthcare decisions and they want real-time information about their health. The MPC offers that with personalized educational information."

Because the device looks like a hand-held video game system, there was some question about the age threshold for acceptance, admits Buncum. "In the pilot test of the MPC we found that 80 percent of all patients were satisfied with the MPC and 78 percent thought it was a good idea to have patients go to the room themselves and view educational material on the MPC," he says. "When we looked only at patients who were 65 and older, we found that 76 percent were satisfied and 73 percent thought the self-rooming and educational materials were good ideas."

It is not only youngsters like the 65-year-olds who were satisfied with the MPC, says Buncum. "We had one 91-year-old woman who was so proud of herself for getting to the exam room on her own. She felt empowered."