In–home caregiver, KidsCare Therapy, identifies tablets as way to streamline clinical documentation while enhancing patient care.
Mobile technology is revolutionizing the delivery of healthcare. Along with smartphones, a growing number of smart-media tablet PCs are finding their way into the hands of caregivers who are interested in delivering better patient care and improving patient outcomes.

Case in point: KidsCare Therapy. The Dallas–based pediatric home healthcare agency prides itself on the quality and positive impact of the in-home speech, physical and occupational therapy services it provides to children with disabilities.

The firm believes that therapy is most effective when conducted one–on–one, in a familiar environment. Therefore, any technology that can enhance the point–of–care service it delivers will have significant impact on the thousands of patients it serves, its approximately 100 therapists and the business overall.

Recently, KidsCare Therapy equipped every therapist with a Samsung GALAXY Tab tablet PC to call up patient data, capture therapy notes and otherwise improve the quality of patient care. The tablet PCs communicate over a broadband mobile network to the company’s core business systems delivering clinical, billing and other information.

Thus far, the firm is reporting success in a number of areas. The tablet PCs have made it easier for therapists to access, input and safely transmit patient information. Telecom service discounts allow for significant savings on annual network charges. And the state–of–the–art solution serves as a recruitment tool for prospective employees – especially therapists.

**Legacy System Drawbacks**

KidsCare Therapy was founded in 2003 with a philosophy that the best service can be delivered in the homes of its patients. The company promotes a strong sense of compassion for the patients it serves. “We also want to nurture our own employees so they can achieve professional growth and satisfaction,” explains Erik Baker, assistant executive director at KidsCare Therapy.

Against the backdrop of these lofty goals, the company’s first generation mobile infrastructure didn’t really measure up. KidsCare Therapy uses what amounts to a hosted enterprise resource planning (ERP) system — called Homecare Homebase (HCHB) — to run core business applications. These include appointment scheduling, clinical information, billing, human resources and so on.

Therapists and other employees access Homecare Homebase through an application called PointCare, which previously ran on Windows Mobile phones. That configuration was fraught with difficulties and limitations. While the phones had connectivity into corporate systems, their form factor, reliability and other limitations made them more of a hindrance to the delivery and documentation of patient care.

A therapist would try to use the phone to input patient visit notes, but the small 4-inch screen and poor usability made this a difficult proposition at best. “You can imagine what it’s like to be on a small smartphone trying to capture notes,” Baker says.

The PointCare application could be automatically synchronized with Homecare Homebase. However, usability of the smartphone forced most therapists to go home or to an office and enter their notes into a computer. They would then upload those notes from their computer to their smartphone.
At that point, the notes could be synced from the smartphone to Homecare Homebase through the PointCare application. The multi-step process was anything but elegant. But it was the technology that had been available, and the company used it for nearly five years.

The system also required significant reliability and management tradeoffs, Baker explains. “There were constantly new patches for the [PointCare] application, and therapists couldn’t upload their visits until patches were complete,” he adds. “The IT staff had to regularly remind therapists to run the latest patches and updates for PointCare on their phones.”

**Technology Upgrade**

The use of dated technology and kludgy connections was about to change. Earlier this year, KidsCare Therapy officials attended a Homecare Homebase conference supported by T-Mobile. There, they got a view into a major upgrade to PointCare that enabled it to run on Android-based tablets, including the Samsung GALAXY Tab.

Based on product demos and the potential of a larger screen that would facilitate therapists’ ability to capture and input data efficiently, they were convinced the tablet-based version of PointCare was the way to go. Company officials strongly believed the tablet version would bring greater reliability and, with greater ease of use, more extensive use by therapists.

The company decided to purchase the Samsung GALAXY Tabs and quickly developed a multi-tiered training strategy to maximize the chances for success once it began to roll out the devices. Therapists participated in training delivered by T-Mobile employees that was focused on basic tablet functionality, settings, network connectivity and so on.

KidsCare clinical managers then gave a class detailing functional and user-oriented differences between PointCare on Windows Mobile vs. Android. The main focus was getting therapists comfortable with using the new technology and avoiding major hiccups along the way. “Using the tablet is so much easier,” Baker says. “It’s considerably more efficient than what we were doing.”

The Samsung GALAXY Tabs are a night-and-day improvement over the previous generation of mobile smartphones used by KidsCare therapists. The first tablets were deployed in early August, and now every therapist has his or her own tablet to use. “They’ve been very well received,” Baker quips. “I’ve had no one complain they want their old phone back by any means.”

KidsCare Therapy selected the 7-inch Samsung GALAXY Tab model because of its portability. It can easily slip into the pocket of a therapist’s scrubs. It can fit cleanly into a purse or carrying case. It also offers superior battery life when compared to other Android tablets on the market, Baker says.

**Technology: The Smart Spend**

KidsCare Therapy made a significant capital investment to purchase almost 150 tablet computers. At the same time, the firm purchased approximately 20 Samsung GALAXY smartphones and more than 100 Samsung t259 cell phones — allowing each clinician to have a tablet PC to run PointCare as well as a cell phone.

The total price came to approximately $30,000. But with bundled, negotiated telecom service pricing, secured through KidsCare partner T-Mobile, the company is actually saving almost $100,000 annually in network charges.

“These discounts were negotiated by Homecare Homebase for their clients and other home healthcare companies in the area they serve,” Baker explains. “There wasn’t really any negotiating on our part.”

With those kinds of savings compared to the capital outlay involved, the company essentially achieved instant ROI on the tablet investment. That’s an outcome that can be embraced by any IT or financial organization.

Being able to purchase an integrated package that includes cellular service and the tablet also makes a big difference when it comes to a smooth, successful rollout, says Dan Welsh, the CDW dedicated account manager who works with KidsCare Therapy. “T-Mobile’s service and compatibility with Homecare Homebase is second to none. They made it a very easy transition for KidsCare.”

KidsCare Therapy chose CDW to manage its mobility project and request for proposal (RFP) process for reviewing wireless carriers, mobile devices and configuration services. Baker credits his partner CDW for its work in facilitating the acquisition of equipment and services, and helping to make the rollout trouble-free.

As a partner and agent of the major wireless carriers (including AT&T, Sprint, T-Mobile and Verizon), CDW was able to secure additional credits for KidsCare Therapy. This helped to reduce the firm’s overall investment in the technology.

In addition, CDW provided custom configuration, imaging, carrier activation and asset tagging on all 150 tablets before they shipped to KidsCare Therapy. PointCare and
Riding the Tablet Wave

Offering full PC functionality in a convenient form factor in any situation, tablet PCs are becoming more popular with mobile healthcare workers. And the same can be said for other industries, per a survey conducted by the staffing firm of Robert Half Technology, where 49 percent of U.S. CIOs stated they will increase use and purchases of tablet PCs over the next two years.

Tablet PCs excel as tools for web surfing, looking at images and viewing videos – all functions that translate well into healthcare and beyond. Plus add-ons like dictation and speech-to-text software, portable keyboards, docking stations and stylus pen navigation all make it easier to use medical software to capture, access and transmit information.

It’s important to note that the enterprise employing tablet PCs, or any new technology investment, is also focused on the business side. Unlocking or enhancing core business apps in a mobile setting can help justify the investment, notes Matt Beagle, senior manager, enterprise sales for T-Mobile, which supplies the tablet computers and cellular services to KidsCare Therapy.

“In general, the enterprise space is looking to figure out why they need to use tablets,” he says. “Where you become really successful is when a revenue-generating application is applied to tablets. This can also open the door to significant innovation.”

master data management (MDM) software were pre-loaded on the devices along with the custom configuration of e-mail.

“CDW made it very hands-free,” Baker says. “I really didn’t have to spend a whole lot of time dealing with it. They did most of the legwork. I simply coordinated the pieces and put everything together.”

While Baker downplays his own vision in executing the tablet plan, his company’s willingness to take the leap into tablet computing places it in the vanguard of healthcare organizations — that is leveraging mobility to let staffers access core systems in the most efficient way possible. That’s an outcome any corporate executive would embrace.