CAST CASE STUDY

MorseLife
Honoring Senior Living

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MorseLife is quick to capitalize on health-reform by embracing accountability to propel its organizational expansion

The eighth in a series of case studies from the Preparing for the Future Report

- Recognized trends towards increased accountability and invested one third of capital budget on information technology
- Developed new clinical pathways for high risk patients to help reduce hospital readmission rates
- Used real-life scenarios to solicit responses to defined requirements in Request for Proposal to EHR providers
- Implemented mobile technology for staff to facilitate communications and deliver educational content

The Organization

More than 27 years ago, the founders of MorseLife set out to provide comprehensive care and service—in the spirit of Jewish traditions and values—to older adults facing the challenges of aging. Throughout the years, this promise has remained the cornerstone of MorseLife's ongoing mission to enhance and honor senior living.

Today, MorseLife is a non-sectarian, charitable organization that cares for seniors in various settings, including its long-term care facility, short-term rehabilitation center, independent and assisted living residence, and through home and community-based services (HCBS) that enable seniors to age in place. The organization also conducts research designed to develop best practices in the care of current and future seniors.

The programs conducted on MorseLife's 37-acre campus serve between 400 and 500 individuals on any given day. Thanks to an expanding HCBS program, MorseLife serves four times as many people in the community surrounding the campus.

Technology-Enabled Service or Model

MorseLife employs a variety of technology in its provision of services and supports, including:

- **Remote monitoring technology:** MorseLife completed research on remote wireless technology more than two years ago and confirmed that this technology can help mitigate acute-care episodes. Using grant funds from a donor, the MorseLife Home and Community Based Services is in the process of purchasing Cybernet Medical's MedStar devices. This remote monitoring technology will be used to help frail older adults manage their advanced chronic conditions.

- **Therapeutic recreation technologies:** The organization uses "It's Never 2 Late" to help residents learn about campus events, interact with their peers and stay in touch with family members.

- **Cognitive rehabilitation technology:** MorseLife makes the Dakim BrainFitness software available to residents.
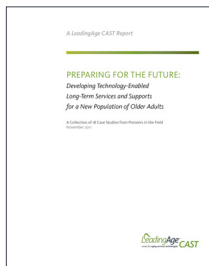
- **A paperless employment application process:** This system features background screening and competency testing.

- **Wireless networking technology:** This technology was installed throughout the MorseLife campus in preparation for the deployment of an electronic health record (EHR) system.

- **Care documentation software:** CareTracker helps certified nursing assistants track activities of daily living in skilled nursing. Casamba tracks rehospitalization rates among older adults discharged from the MorseLife rehabilitation center.

Implementation Approach

Affordable Care Act: When the Affordable Care Act (ACA) became law in 2009, MorseLife immediately understood that the historic health reform legislation would have an impact on providers of long-term services and support systems. The organization worked with Artower Associates, a group of advisors formerly associated with Dixon Hughes, to improve its understanding of the law's components. This education process led to a summer retreat in 2010, during which the MorseLife's 45-member management council recommended a collection of strategic initiatives that the organization should pursue in order to participate fully in health reform initiatives.

MorseLife has worked hard to develop relationships with hospitals and physician groups and to position itself as a useful partner that can help reduce local hospital readmission rates. To complement this effort, the organization developed new clinical pathways for patients with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, congestive heart failure, hip and knee replacements, and stroke. MorseLife is also taking steps to track critical outcomes and readmission data that can help the organization promote itself as a potential collaborator in any Accountable Care Organization (ACO) that is established as part of health reform.

EHR: Instead of relying on vendors to sell their EHR systems to MorseLife, the organization decided to articulate the benefits and features it wanted its future EHR system to provide. With those requirements defined, MorseLife then issued a Request for Proposals that helped it narrow its search to a few EHR vendors. MorseLife vetted those vendors by providing them with a number of real-life scenarios and asking them to demonstrate how their EHR software would address the issues raised in the scenario.

Business Case

MorseLife spent over $350,000 on information technology in 2010, a figure that represents one third of its capital budget. This included wiring the campus for Internet, purchasing CareTracker and Casamba, and providing smart phones for management staff.

Key to Success

Technology-enabled home and community-based services: MorseLife has 280 skilled nursing beds and 144 independent and assisted living apartments on its West Palm Beach campus. Unwilling to limit its services to residents of these on-campus accommodations, the organization made a strategic decision to expand and strengthen its home and community-based services (HCBS) as a way to create new initiatives and increase revenues. Putting a sophisticated information technology platform in place was a key to making the HCBS initiative a success.

Organizational expansion: MorseLife has been working hard to expand its organizational capacity so that it remains competitive and is able to participate as much as possible in health-reform initiatives. In that effort, the organization acquired a comprehensive outpatient rehabilitation facility/staffing company. It is also actively exploring the possibility of establishing a Program of All-inclusive Care for the Elderly (PACE), and has embarked on a membership initiative. Other expansion efforts include active exploration of a second campus and re-configuring its current campus. In addition, the organization has established MorseLife All, a smart phone application that delivers educational curricula and program services to organization staff. Finally, MorseLife added a community-based organization that resembles a Naturally Occurring Retirement Community, as well as the Stroke of Hope, a post-acute care program for "victors" of stroke.

Advice to Others

Do Not "Wait and See." Organizations may be tempted to wait and see what happens to health care reform, and may assume that the ACA will be repealed or substantially amended. MorseLife operates under quite a different assumption. It believes that no matter what happens to the ACA, several key health-reform principles will never disappear:

- Reductions to Medicare and Medicaid.

- Bundling of services.

- A national movement away from institutional care and toward home and community-based services.

- A similar movement away from paying for services and toward paying for quality.

Health information technology will play a critical role in helping providers of long-term services and supports succeed within the context of these health-reform principles. ∎