

The importance of data in home care is a repeated theme members will see throughout this issue of *The Voice* and the Home Care Association of America's communications throughout the year.

HCAOA's policy priority to collect, evaluate and utilize data to validate the value of home care is not an empty platitude, but a serious appeal to members to see the vast potential to grow the home care industry.



Guy Tommasi, Jr., BS, MS | Managing Director

LIFETIME Care at Home, LLC | Guy Tommasi, Jr., BS, MS, is the Managing Director for LIFETIME Care at Home, LLC, a non-medical home care provider in Guilford, CT. His 40-plus-year background spans the fields of hospital, home health, and home care systems. Tommasi began collecting measurable data outcomes in 2016 as a competitive differentiator. This data has improved LIFETIME's bottom line with double-digit returns over the last 5 fiscal years and earned the company multiple awards.

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Jeff Wiberg | Chief Executive Officer

Family Resource Home Care | Jeff Wiberg is the CEO of Family Resource Home Care, overseeing strategy, culture, and vision for the independently owned home care agency with over twenty locations across Washington, Oregon, and Idaho. Jeff has over a decade of experience in the healthcare continuum and is a nationally recognized thought leader in the home care industry.

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Bob Roth | Managing Partner

Cypress HomeCare Solutions | Bob Roth is Managing Partner of Cypress HomeCare Solutions. Bob and his family created Cypress HomeCare Solutions in 1994. With nearly 38 years of consumer products, health care and technology experience, Bob has successfully brought the depth and breadth of his experience to the home care trade. Cypress HomeCare Solutions has received many awards over the years.



The Growing Urgency for DATA COLLECTION in Home Care

Without data, your home care agency may fall behind.

The healthcare and health insurance reimbursement landscape are changing rapidly. From the changes in Medicare Advantage plans in 2018 to the spotlight on home care provided by the pandemic and our rapidly aging population, healthcare providers' and insurers' interest in the potential benefits of home care has grown and will continue. Home care providers who can empirically prove their value with data and speak the language of healthcare with numbers will surpass their competitors.

Additionally, the home care industry needs caregivers. Providers can use data to recruit them. Research shows that the desire to do meaningful work that helps others is a major characteristic of the millennial generation.

Now is the time to collect and use data to influence the future of our industry and those who we need to persuade – policymakers, Medicare, health insurance plans, healthcare referrers, families and prospective employees.

We interviewed three leaders of independent agencies about their perspective on home care data collection, the benefits of data collection and how to begin—including what data points to collect. The following insights will help as you consider collecting data.

Data Makes a Difference

According to LIFETIME Care at Home's Managing Director Guy Tommasi, LIFETIME Care at Home got into data collection by accident. About six years ago, LIFETIME Care at Home needed to do something to differentiate themselves from their 700+ home care competitors in Connecticut.

Tommasi's careful research and foresight directed his team to focus on collecting data that could be applied to caregivers and clients and also the outcomes and pain points that challenged their stakeholders.

The move changed the trajectory of LIFETIME Care at Home, opening the door for growth and, most recently, a merger with Yale New Haven Health System—one of the largest healthcare systems in the state.

Jeff Wiberg, CEO of Family Resource Home Care, is a self-proclaimed "data nerd." He believes data informs better decision-making and indicates whether his organization is doing a good job. Family Resource Home Care has always collected data and key performance indicators so they could benchmark themselves against the rest of the industry.



Recently, Wiberg has noticed a strong trend of employees choosing their employer based, in part, upon their mission-oriented focus. Demonstrating the value of caregivers empirically through data, like satisfaction rates and estimated hospital admission preventions, has increased employee satisfaction rates and attracted caregivers.

Managing Partner of Cypress Home Care Solutions, Bob Roth, began his organization following a personal experience caring for his mother after a series of near-fatal heart attacks when she was just 48-years-old. His 28-year-old family business always collects data because of its importance in formulating care plans and providing high-quality services, he shared.

Roth believes data helps to substantiate his organization's place in the healthcare continuum. He sees the opportunity to persuade payers to focus more on the "pre-acute" value of home care to prevent hospital admissions altogether. He believes changing the view of home care to a more holistic approach would enable seniors and their families to have a better quality of life across the board.

The stress of family members caring for another family member 65 and older without the assistance of additional family members, neighbors, friends or professionals is immense, Roth shared. According to a [JAMA study](#), 63 percent of spousal caregivers pre-decease the care recipient and other family caregivers increases their risk for health problems.

"By providing pre-acute care, we are able to keep our clients and families together and extend one's ability to stay in the comfort of their own home," Roth stated.

Data Validates Home Care's Value

Why do home care agencies need to collect data?

"COVID introduced home care faster than we ever could have done on our own. Home care and home health was the core of the pandemic in the home," Tommasi stated. "But we have not done a good job of promoting and elevating the status of home care. Our industry was never challenged from a regulatory standpoint to produce the level of data that was needed in order to meet regulatory standards. Every other piece of the healthcare continuum [has that] with significant financial impacts."

"We're good at what we do. We just haven't told our

story [with data]," agreed Roth. "A label that was given to us many years ago was being called 'non-medical.' And when you refer to something as non-medical, you're telling the world what you are not, but not telling them what you are. We were put into a box of being non-medical, non-clinical, non-skilled."

"[So, the importance of data collection] has changed because we are beginning to recognize how the rest of the world has to look at us," shared Wiberg. "We don't have the advantage of having been validated for decades and decades like the medical industry, thereby equipping actuaries with information demonstrating [home care's value.]"

He added, "[Yet] we have started to see the evolution of Medicare Advantage or various state programs really starting to pay attention to home care... they have seen the need for home care is just huge."

Influencing Insurers, Persuading Policymakers and Reassuring Relatives with Data

Wiberg shared that Family Resource Home Care has used data to justify their services to insurance companies. Some simply do not understand the benefit of home care services and how it benefits clients. Yet, these are the same people who are tasked with providing good services and getting better outcomes for their policyholders.

"[LIFETIME Care at Home] stakeholders look more at satisfaction scores," shared Tommasi. "Medicare Advantage (MA) plans live and die by enrollment. Why? More than 80 percent of MA enrollees are in plans with 4 stars or better. A change by just 1 star has a direct impact on membership of 14-17 percent. MA and other insurance plans are turning to agencies with high levels of satisfaction."

"By capturing the right data—meaning what the pain points of the rest of the stakeholders are—and addressing those as an industry, we are starting to speak their language and we only have one place to go. That is straight up. The credibility becomes incredible," Tommasi emphasized.

Health insurers are not the only ones to persuade, though.

"We use data for referral partners all the time.



Specifically, legislative bodies and policymakers,” Wiberg shared. “When you have data, you are speaking a language that is more empirical and less opinionated. It is helpful for policymakers who are inundated by opinions all day long. [That empirical data] really demonstrates the value and therefore, sways policymakers towards your way of thinking.”

Referring agencies and families also feel more comfortable working with home care agencies whose data supports their claims of quality care.

“[When a home care provider is] able to take the data and go to a family member, it builds credibility and trust to keep their loved one at home. Data should support their outcomes, assertions, and reasons to step up care,” shared Tommasi. “If indeed 80 percent of medical outcomes are a result of social determinants of health, that is screaming, ‘Home care! Home care! Home care!’”

All three agreed HCAOA’s leadership in championing the cause for data collection in the home care industry is valuable to ensure consistency in the data collected.

“If we can provide a reputable, ordered magnitude of empirical data that is consistently collected with rigorous standards, then we will benefit as an industry,” shared Wiberg. “We won’t have to be the ones waving our own individual flags, but there will be a monstrous banner that represents the whole.”

“We have to solve this problem,” emphasized Roth. “We have to make care available to every American that wants it. And how do we get close to that? By telling our story and substantiating it by collecting data.”

What Data Should Home Care Providers Collect

Getting started can be the hardest part of any task, especially when faced with the urgent and important tasks involved in running a business.

“You can easily get inundated with data and be frustrated by it,” shared Tommasi. “[But] if agencies are going to jump in on this great opportunity, it has to start at the top. It has to be part of the daily routine... because consistency is critical. Stakeholders live and die by numbers and data. If you try to pass that off

and they see through it, your credibility is shot.”

Next, Tommasi advises that agencies focus on what their stakeholders really want and need. Focus on things that elevate stress levels, pique pain points and cause challenges that face hospitals, home health agencies, physicians, Medicare Advantage and even families, he recommends.

To start, concentrate on collecting basic data—rehospitalizations, satisfaction, Emergency Department visits, and falls

“Simple is better. If we concentrate on some very basic data—rehospitalizations, satisfaction, Emergency Department (ED) visits, and falls—we can change the industry,” he shared. “Those four issues are the same four pain points that every single stakeholder is experiencing because of Centers for Medicare and Medicaid (CMS) [requirements]. Most of those are centered around functionality and satisfaction, which is what we have been doing for years.”

“And why use terms like that instead of saying activities of daily living (ADLs)? Because if you are going to be like them, you have to talk like them,” Tommasi added.

“Satisfaction scores are something we have long seen as a best practice in our industry,” Wiberg said. “That is so important [because] reimbursement for Accountable Care Organizations (ACOs), as well as MA plans, are in part based on patient satisfaction scores. If you can empirically demonstrate that your agency has highly satisfied clients, it’s going to be a better value proposition for your agency to partner with those plans, payers, ACOs or referral sources.”

“[Cypress Home Care] doesn’t always get people from hospitals,” shared Roth. “But we can track ER visits, falls, and the other piece that is really important—customer satisfaction. And, caregiver satisfaction too. We need that data to substantiate our purpose.”

How to Begin Collecting Data

Start by working with a software provider. HCAOA partners with various software vendors who serve the home care industry whose profiles are on the pages following this article.

"If members are using software that doesn't offer a mechanism to collect data, then they need to sit up and pay attention," Wiberg warned. "The days of 'mom and pop' home care agencies providing care in the same way they have always done it are going to wane. Eventually the funding dam is going to break and even those with means will want to lean into insurance."

HCAOA's Data and Research Committee Helps Members

"Data is really going to substantiate our place in the healthcare continuum," Roth said. "We need to earn our seat at the table. And we haven't quite earned

that because we don't all have the data. That is why Guy and I are co-chairing the HCAOA Data and Research Committee."

The HCAOA Data and Research Committee brings together home care owners and leaders, as well as software companies to bring benchmarks like readmission, ED visits, falls and satisfaction to data collection.

"Currently, we are looking for funding to conduct surveys to set those benchmarks," shared Tommasi. "If we can get this study done, the entire industry benefits and it will catapult the industry to a level that is competitive with everyone else. We just need the funding."

HCAOA members are encouraged to contact Vicki Hoak, Guy Tommasi or Bob Roth, if they would like to know more or participate in the HCAOA Data and Research Committee. Members can reach them by emailing info@hcaoa.org.

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Software Solutions for Data Management Needs

Home Care Association of America has a number of associate members who provide software services for home care providers. To help your organization collect home care data to validate the credibility and value of the industry, contact one of the partners listed below to learn more about the services they offer.



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