



Chronic Care in the New Millennium

by *Richard J. Bringewatt*

The nature of health care in the United States and Europe is in the midst of profound change. Many diseases once diagnosed and treated only through a visit to a hospital can now be treated in a clinic or in the home. People who once needed to be placed in nursing homes can now be maintained for longer periods of time in their own residence through new medications, educated support from family and friends, changes in diet, proper exercise, and technology not previously available.

Internet technology is significantly advancing this transition to caring for people in the community. Those who have access to Internet services can obtain some of the best medical information available on the spectrum of health care concerns. This is particularly good news for people affected by serious and disabling chronic illnesses, such as diabetes, AIDS, cancer, many heart and lung diseases and dementia.

The Internet has the potential to offer services to address these needs. The Internet enables access to information about:

- Origins of their diseases and its impact on their lives;
- Treatment methods that have been demonstrated to work best;
- The latest pharmaceutical and medical technologies;
- Health care professionals in other parts of the world;
- Risks for other diseases;
- Options for preventing, delaying,

or minimizing the progression of disability;

- Methods for increasing functional ability at home and at work; and
- How to get around the community.


They can see what services are available to them and review information about the experience, qualifications and reputation of potential care providers. They can schedule appointments, access their medical records, and communicate with selected care professionals, without leaving their home.

Opportunities to use the Internet to enhance health care will become more pronounced as the world comes to understand that people with problems of chronic illness are the world's highest-cost and fastest-growing patient population. However, neither long term cost savings nor quality objectives will be attained until the spectrum of people involved in financing, administering, and delivering care understands that the nature of chronic illness is fundamentally different than most problems seen in the past. The methods we currently use to manage cost information and care defy the logic of chronic illness. Chronic care problems require a new approach.

The Nature of Chronic Illness

The National Chronic Care Consortium (NCCC) is an international health care organization based in the United States and organized to improve care for people with chronic diseases and disabilities. Its members have reputations for offering the most

(continued on page 4)



Geriatric Care Management
Journal

Published by the:
National Association of Professional Geriatric Care Managers
1604 North Country Club Road
Tucson, Arizona 85716-3102
www.caremanager.org

Published quarterly for members of GCM
Non-member subscriptions: \$75.00 per year

© Copyright 2001

The *GCM Journal* is published as a membership benefit to members of the National Association of Professional Geriatric Care Managers. Non-members may subscribe to *GCM Journal* for \$75.00 per year. Send a check for your one-year subscription to: Subscription Department, GCM, 1604 N. Country Club Road, Tucson, AZ 85716-3102.

EDITORIAL BOARD

Laura Hyatt, MBA
Los Angeles, CA

Lenard W. Kaye, Ph.D.
Bryn Mawr, PA

Karen Knutson, MSN, MBA, RN
Charlotte, NC

Marcie Parker, Ph.D.
Golden Valley, MN

EDITOR IN CHIEF
Monika White, Ph.D.
Santa Monica, CA.

COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR
Jihane K. Rohrbacker
Tucson, AZ

COMMUNICATIONS COORDINATOR
Kimberly R. Hess
Tucson, AZ

GRAPHIC DESIGNER
Kristin L. Hager
Redmond, WA

Chronic Care in the New Millennium

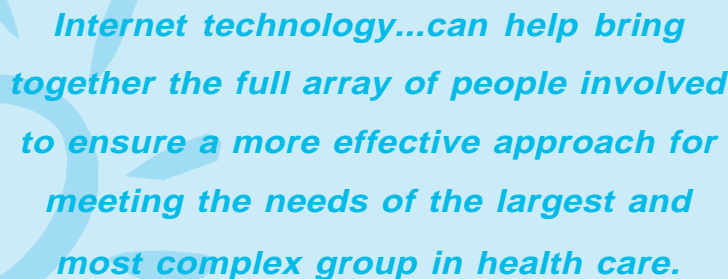
(continued from page 3)

advanced services in care of people with chronic diseases and disabilities in the United States and Canada. Since 1991, NCCC has concentrated primarily on advancing the state of the art in administering, financing and delivering care to people with chronic conditions through clinics, hospitals, nursing homes and other home and community based facilities and service providers.

NCCC members believe that the starting point for transforming health care is understanding the needs of people with chronic conditions. As Internet technology evolves, developers should take note of several prevailing characteristics of chronic disease and disability: their needs are multidimensional, interrelated, disabling, interpersonal and on-going.

- **Multidimensional:** Chronic conditions are multidimensional in nature. People with chronic conditions experience limitations in their ability to think, work, and socialize, in their ability to perform basic activities of daily living and in their ability to find meaning in their lives.
- **Interdependent:** The needs of people with chronic conditions are highly interrelated. Problems of biochemistry are related to emotional health, wellbeing, and ability to perform basic activities of daily living. Many times, more than one disease is present and these co-morbid conditions can cause complications in treatment.
- **Disabling:** Medical concerns dominate most care decision. However, from the perspective of a person with a chronic condition, the primary issue is function, not disease. Therefore health care must focus on

preventing, delaying, or minimizing the progression of disability. Service providers should address the natural evolution of chronic conditions, understand the risk factors associated with next-phase disability progression, and help with interventions that reduce the probability of future care needs.



Internet technology...can help bring together the full array of people involved to ensure a more effective approach for meeting the needs of the largest and most complex group in health care.

- **Personal/Interpersonal:** Most health care professionals underestimate the power of hope, the role of the family and other informal supports, and the impact that a disease has on lifestyle, family expectations, work, and social environment.
- **On-going:** Finally, there is a need to acknowledge the continuing nature of chronic conditions recognizing that issues transpire over a period of time rather than a particular point in time. The stages of a disease or disability need to be addressed. People need to be assisted in coping with the effects of their conditions throughout their lifetime.

Systems Transformation

Internet technology can be extremely useful in linking and providing support to the entire spectrum of organizations that address problems of chronic illness. It has the potential to help transform how care is managed in significant ways. It can help bring together the full array of people involved to ensure a more effective approach for meeting

the needs of the largest and most complex group in health care. This can be accomplished through integration of a number of important components of care systems:

- **Management:** Technology can help executives and managers of health systems assess new information about care and communicate more effectively with others involved in transformation service operations. It can offer new information about how to measure quality and support in monitoring cost, quality, and customer satisfaction.

- **Integrated Care Management:** Internet technology can help care providers, who

serve the same individuals, share important information. For example, as a person moves from one setting to another, the same information does not have to be repeated over and over. Care providers can know what others are doing so that services will be complementary rather than duplicative or in conflict. It can help to significantly simplify the process.

- **Integrated Information:** The Internet can help connect information about care that will enable everyone to ultimately know what combination of services is most cost effective. It can simplify record-keeping, billing, tracking outcomes, measuring systems performance, developing consistent methods of operation and improving the ability of multiple care providers to serve the same person as the condition evolves over time.
- **Integrated Financing:** Internet technology can help funders determine what is truly most cost effective in caring for people with

(continued on page 5)

Chronic Care in the New Millennium

(continued from page 4)

chronic conditions. Management of costs and care can be achieved through accurate, timely data including tracking of service outcomes and provider productivity.

- **Integrated Policy:** Technology can help policymakers provide important leadership in transforming health care operations as the nature of health care changes from an acute to a chronic care problem orientation. It can help create agendas to decrease the projected incidence and prevalence of chronic conditions through better care interventions and to shift from an emphasis on cost reduction toward exploring what incentives can enable care in keeping with the nature of chronic illness.

Preparing For the Future

As people develop and distribute Internet technology in support of people with chronic conditions, it is important to:

1. Think Systems

We must acknowledge that chronic care is a systems problem and requires a systems solution. While many of the pieces of health care must be preserved, long term success depends on our ability to bring together the components that serve a common population. Systems can help to integrate care as a person's chronic condition evolves across time, place, and profession and reinforces their ability to maintain health and wellbeing in a home environment.

2. Focus Energy on the Future

We must remember that the future is

ours to define. It does not, nor should it require, preservation of the past. With the power of Internet technology we can create a new and more effective way of serving people with chronic illness everywhere in the world. We must establish clarity about this kind of world and build systems to embrace a more positive and productive way of living.

3. Bridge the Boundaries of Social Institutions

We must bring together all the disparate players who are concerned about chronic care including government, insurance carriers, providers, consumers, family members, and interested others. We must help them all work together in addressing one of the most complex and important health care problems of our time.

4. Build a New Infrastructure for Decision Making

We must use the power of the Internet to enable everyone to make better decisions. These decisions are not simply to do what is currently being done more easily, but to improve how we administer, finance, and delivery care.

5. Get on With It

Finally, we must act. How people proceed will vary from one organization to another. However, regardless of the setting, it is critical that we:

- Empower people with chronic illnesses to optimize their health and well being;
- Build effective relationships with those who provide care;
- Create financial incentives and investment for systems transformation; and,
- Commit to getting on with the task at hand, with tenacity and purpose for establishing the culture, tools, and technology for effective action.

The Internet holds great promise in addressing the needs of the chronically ill. We need to do more than simply apply new technology to old ways of doing business. Our goal must be to fundamentally change the nature of how we do business with sensitivity to improving the way in which we care for our most vulnerable world citizens. We must move away from component-based management, specialized medicine, and facility-based planning and toward more of a person-centered, collaborative model of care where seemingly disparate programs function as a single system. We must seize the moment and establish new methods of operation that are more in keeping with what we know will be the primary health care business of the 21st century-problems of chronic disease and disability.

Richard J. Bringewatt, is president and CEO of the National Chronic Care Consortium, headquartered in Bloomington, MN outside of Minneapolis. The NCCC is a

strategic alliance of leading health plans and providers in the U.S. and Canada, collaborating to develop real-world solutions in chronic illness care. Dr. Bringewatt is a founder of NCCC, lectures throughout the country and is active in national and local policy development on behalf of chronic and disabled persons.

We must acknowledge that chronic care is a systems problem and requires a systems solution. While many of the pieces of health care must be preserved, long term success depends on our ability to bring together the components that serve a common population.