

BlueCross BlueShield improves quality of care with mobile information physicians can access while treating patients

BlueCross BlueShield is providing Rochester physicians with handhelds that enable them to instantly identify specialists, look up drug interactions and refer to treatment guidelines and HMO policies. Patients receive better care, doctors make more informed decisions, and the plan may be able to cut prescription drug costs.

About Blue Cross/Blue Shield

BlueCross BlueShield of the Rochester Area (BCBSRA), a subsidiary of Excellus Health Plan, Inc., provides health insurance for more than 800,000 members in six New York counties. The company's HMOs have been consistently ranked among the top five in the nation by *Newsweek* magazine.

Solution Highlights

- Instant access to treatment-critical information from any location
- Improved care and physician efficiency plus potential to cut prescription drug costs by 2-5% annually
- Small, lightweight handhelds have processing power and capacity to run applications and store large amounts of data locally
- Periodic synchronization with BCBSRA database using Internet and desktop HotSync® cradle
- Infrared communications for hardcopy output to shared printers

"We recognized that physicians had information overload in part because we give them lots of rules to follow. We wanted to make it as easy as possible." –David McDowell, CIO

The Challenge

To ensure consistently excellent healthcare, BlueCross BlueShield of the Rochester Area (BCBSRA) must provide its Blue Choice physicians with detailed medical information and HMO guidelines. Every day physicians refer to this information to prescribe treatments, verify drug dosages and interactions, locate HMO-approved specialists and pharmacies, and provide patients with discharge instructions.

Yet BCBSRA doesn't want to burden physicians with documents or get in the way of their interactions with patients. The insurer needed a way to compress the growing volume of information into something small and light enough for physicians to carry comfortably in a pocket. The solution also had to be fast and simple to use, so physicians could access information while continuing to examine and talk to patients.

The Palm Handheld Solution

Blue Choice HMO physicians now have the opportunity to carry a Palm™ handheld for mobile information access. Medical reference applications, developed by consulting firm Analysts International, let users quickly search specialist and pharmacy listings, a compendium of commonly prescribed drugs and clinical guidelines. By simply pointing their handhelds at infrared devices located at nursing stations, physicians can even print discharge instructions for patients.

Every 90 days the Palm handhelds are synchronized with the BCBSRA Web site to obtain the most current content. Physicians simply place the handheld in a

HotSync® cradle next to their office PC, log onto the secure site and touch a button to download the updated information.

The initial rollout to 250 Blue Choice physicians, a joint initiative with the Rochester Individual Practice Association (RIPA), has been so successful that BCBSRA intends to offer handhelds to all its 2000 physicians in the area. Initial results indicate substantial improvements in patient care and physician efficiency as well as the potential to shave between 2-5% from the \$250 million BCBSRA now spends annually for prescription drugs.