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Here's a high-tech headache cure for small health care providers

For many years health care providers have contracted with information technology providers to fix systems when they break — to act more like an emergency room technician.



**PRESCRIPTION
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Chances are your practice has been in the mode of constantly trading money for an hour of service, and only calling your IT service provider when something was broken.

The IT service provider would benefit monetarily when something would break, as there was no financial incentive for them to want systems to be up and running all the time.

That is all about to change with the concept of “total care.”

Although many IT providers are currently offering many different fee arrangements that may encompass an “all you can eat” approach, it does not accomplish the total care style of managing IT for health care clients.

With the total care model, the IT providers are not your “break-fix” computer guy or gal. Rather, they are your proactive and trusted IT advisor. They can even offer CIO-level advice to your practice.

In this model, the client is billed a flat fee based on the network that is supported and vendors that are managed.

The client is able to control and reduce their overall operating costs and bud-

get these costs much more effectively. Increased operational efficiency can be expected with a well-maintained, proactively-serviced network.

Additionally, downtime is minimized, which also adds dollars to the bottom line.

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While the total care approach — traditionally referred to as “managed services” — has been helping large companies handle their IT needs for some time, the concept is only now beginning to show its potential in smaller operations such as health care offices.

In recent years, as technology costs have lowered and managed service providers have decreased their fees, smaller businesses have been increasingly able to afford such services.

This means health care businesses are ripe for a new approach. Because doctors and their support staff increasingly need the highest level of technical service and the least possible downtime, they are poised to take advantage of the benefits this kind of system brings.

Most importantly from the health care operation's perspective — and as the total

care designation implies — far more than service and upkeep can be included.

In addition to preventive maintenance, health care operations can have their servers and workstations patched nightly, and have their networks monitored for spyware, viruses, failed backups and other potential problems — before they become an issue.

Another benefit to this approach is that the IT advisor manages the client's vendors so the client can spend more time running their core business.

The advisor does all the interfacing with vendors such as telephone system support, business practice management software, Internet providers, copy, fax and printer equipment vendors.

Proactively managing the IT environment with remote tools and methods allows the IT advisor to meet with health care clients and strategically plan for their future.

Any IT advisor should focus on their business needs such as electronic medical records, document management, wireless tablets and tools, and Internet telephone service.

A new way for health care providers to look at IT is here now, and it is here to stay. It will benefit those health care providers that decide to embrace it as their information technology solution by letting them focus on running their business without worrying about escalating IT costs, excessive downtime, and vendor management.

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