

Observer~Tribune

Firm hopes to bring doctors into 21st Century

By PHIL GARBER, Managing Editor

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WASHINGTON TWP. – It is an anachronism that in today's digitized world of high speed Internet that medical patients still fill out voluminous forms long hand while hand-written referrals are faxed and doctors scribble down drug orders that pharmacists later struggle to decipher.

The arcane process not only takes up an inordinate of time, but it also too often leads to potentially, dangerous medical consequences when a doctor may not be aware of other medications a patient has been prescribed by other doctors.

Alan Walbaum, a Long Valley Technology specialist, hopes to be on the cutting edge of helping to not only save time but lives by providing computerized medical records.

Walbaum, a former airline and financial information technology expert, has started a new firm, Allutia. His service allows doctors to quickly share computerized patient information and other medical records with other doctors, specialists and hospitals, Walbaum has a patent pending for the program, which is secure and meets privacy specifications under the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA).

Walbaum said he and his five employees have all completed courses on HIPPA compliancy.

Walbaum said the medical industry will inevitably adopt common computer systems similar to the way Wall Street now has systems so that banks and other financial institutions can easily communicate.

Friend's Consternation:

Walbaum said his interest in medical technology began after a friend and colleague needed surgery about two years ago and told Walbaum about the tribulations of filling out unending medical forms.

He also began discussing the subject with his sister, and two brothers-in-law, who are all in the medical field.

Walbaum said he discovered that many hospitals, doctors and other medical practitioners have different, practice management systems and that the systems often cannot communicate together.

The medical industry and federal government have created an alphabet soup of acronyms to try and insure continuous care, with such names as CCRE (Continuity of Care Records) and HIE (Health Information Exchange).

But the problem is often that one hospital can't communicate its CCRE with another and that information systems have been developed in "silos" where they can communicate with their system but not to the outside.

Walbaum said it seemed self-evident that many problems and potential problems could be avoided if there were a centralized, compatible system to share medical records.

Typically, a doctor requires a new patient to fill out a lengthy medical history form. If the patient is referred to a specialist, another medical history form is required often because the specialist cannot be certain that the original form is complete and accurate.

Both forms can further be subject to errors caused by a patient's faulty memory or simply not understanding a question on a form.

"The process is very cumbersome and prone to human error", Walbaum said. "Too often, doctors don't know the information they need to know."

As he studied the subject, Walbaum also became familiar with federal laws passed under President George W. Bush and pending rules for computerized record keeping included in the federal health reform bill under President Barack Obama.

Known by yet another acronym, HITECH (Health Information, Technical for Economic and Clinical Health Act), passed under Bush, requires that doctors maintain computerized records of patients' drug histories, including drug interactions and contraindications.

The federal government also requires physicians to prove "meaningful use" of electronic record keeping and offers grants of up to \$44,000 to doctors who implement the new systems.

The result of Walbaum's inquiries was the formation of Allutia. After a medical professional registers with Allutia, patients fill out medical forms online and in advance of a visit to a doctor, saving time and allowing patients to more carefully fill out the forms.

The patient's medical history along with any treatment ordered by physicians is then made available to hospitals or other professionals enrolled in the program. Eventually, Walbaum said he hopes to provide patient information on computer flash drives that can be kept on a key chain and easily made available in emergencies.

Quick access to medical histories, including all medications, can prove life-saving if a person is on vacation or otherwise away from home and must receive emergency medical treatment, Walbaum said.

Allutia also includes so called "MD Helpers" that automatically trigger alerts to the doctor that can range from noting when a patient's body mass falls or rises too much or indicating side effects and contraindications to drugs.

The response among the medical industry to Allutia has been slow with only a handful of doctors and no hospitals on board so far.

"We're finding it's hard to change the way doctors have been doing business for so many years," Walbaum said. "It takes a cultural or paradigm shift."

One of his customers is the dentist, Howard Goodkin and Associates at 59 E. Mill Road in Long Valley. Jill Goodkin, the office manager and the dentist's wife, said Allutia has improved the process.

"We would like to make it as easy for patients as possible and this (Allutia) makes it a lot easier" Goodkin said.

She said the system minimizes mistakes caused by illegible doctor's notes and it speeds up the process for patients.

"It's a great tool," Goodkin said. "I don't see a downside."

Allutia is inexpensive at fees of \$9.99 to \$24.99 a month, depending on the size of the practice. Despite the low rates, Walbaum said the potential for profit is high if he can enlist just a small percentage of the nation's \$600,000 general practitioners.

Walbaum and his wife, Camille, have two daughters, Michelle, 23 and Kara, 21. They have lived on Parkview Road in Long Valley since 1991.