



3-minute case study: A kiosk for elder care

By Lia Novotny | November 29, 2017

What innovations drive success in healthcare? Here's one proven tactic from a community healthcare system.

The problem

It's tough to be elderly. Getting to medical appointments can be tricky. Understanding health information is hard. Learning to ask for help is harder. So, in 2012, Greater Lynn Senior Services (GLSS), a nonprofit agency supporting residents 60 and over, people living with disabilities, and their caregivers in Massachusetts, decided to make it easier – and even fun – to be elderly.

The solution

The GLSS team invented a single, simple solution for a host of complex problems: the Kiosk for Living Well. Set up in senior centers and elder housing complexes – wherever seniors gather in the community – each kiosk contains a large touchscreen and a comfortable chair in a colorful, welcoming space. The kiosks are staffed by a GLSS

staff member and a volunteer advisor trained in motivational listening and problem-solving.

Generally open twice a week for three hours at a time, the kiosks invite seniors to try out interactive puzzles and brain teasers that are both fun and boost cognitive function. They can also use the kiosks to Skype with their families.

The goal, says Valerie Parker Callahan, GLSS's director of planning and development, is to create "social magnets that attract people. Then they begin to learn and engage in problem-solving around health issues."

Along with games, the kiosks offer more than 35 modular "e-tools" on specific health conditions, each with a short video, relevant games, and a printable tip sheet that helps patients recognize red flags, determine when to call their doctor, and know what to say when they get there.

Key to the kiosks' success: Nurses, kinesiologists, and community health workers also visit them to conduct hypertension screenings and fall-risk

assessments. They can then refer seniors on the spot to nearby strength and balance classes or schedule home visits to assess hazards.

And, where the appropriate agreements are in place with patients and providers, kiosk staff enter screening results and referrals directly into patients' electronic health records.

The outcome

Seniors have visited the kiosks more than 23,000 times since they were installed. More than half screened for hypertension have lowered their blood pressure. In a recent assessment, those identified as a high risk for falling show a 66 percent increase in strength and balance one month after attending group exercise classes and/or practicing individualized exercises. And both diabetic and pre-diabetic patients seen at the kiosks are losing weight.

Patients tell GLSS they "just feel better" since visiting a kiosk. Many follow a session at a kiosk with an appointment with their doctor. And, occasionally, kiosk staff have identified patients with life-threatening conditions and accompanied them directly from the kiosk to an emergency department.

Moving geriatric care into the community via the kiosks enables GLSS to deepen its understanding of patients' lives. "Perhaps 10 percent of the total health

outcome is predicated on a clinical care encounter," says Parker Callahan. "The rest is understanding how people are interacting in the community. We are the rest."

Lia Novotny is a contributing writer for athenaInsight.

Artwork by Molly Ferguson.



A daily news hub reporting from the heart of the health care internet, with access to a comprehensive data set of health care transactions from athenahealth's nationwide network. We equip leaders with actionable insight and inspiration for making health care work as it should.

Stay in the know

Sign up for weekly data and news:
insight.athenahealth.com/newsletter-signup