



A case study on the implementation of easyLog's care-Log homecare staff scheduling and contract administration system

By any measure, the Abicare Services group based in Salisbury, Wiltshire, is an organisation that has evolved at a rapid pace over the last decade. The company started as a small domiciliary care agency based at a nursing home and employing around 20 carers that visited approximately 50 service users in the local area.

Abicare now operates across a total of eight Local Authorities and Primary Care Trusts stretching from South Wales to West Sussex, employs over 200 carers providing 4000 hours of care per week to a client base that numbers in excess of 500. In addition, the group offers an expanding 'live in' service and has added to this Abiclean which, as the name suggests, provides a house cleaning service for service users' homes as well as commercial premises.

Expansion plans have not stopped however with other services in the pipeline including a ground-breaking CCTV-based facility that will enable clients to monitor remotely that their elderly relative is well and comfortable and communicate with them via their television. And, as this latest venture suggests, driving the development of the group has not only been the innovative thinking to create these new ventures but the successful implementation of IT systems to support the necessary processes that underpin them.

Partnership Approach

As Abicare Managing Director Anne-Marie Perry comments, a partnership approach has been very much at the centre of developing her organisation's IT strategy, "I first met representatives from easyLog at a care home event where I was looking for a staff scheduling system for the nursing home. I was impressed with the flexibility yet overall simplicity of operation of their software application. But what also caught my eye was the unique and inventive range of other products that the company offered including solutions for carer night checks and visit recording and fridge and freezer temperature monitoring. All of these were of interest at the time and easyLog has continued to develop systems with us and for us."

The staff scheduling software was duly purchased for the nursing home together with the a-Log visit recording system for the domiciliary care business. a-Log is based around a small battery powered handheld device that each carer carries with them. A location identifier – a Pound coin sized button that holds a unique identity to reference the individual service user's property – is placed in the care plan folder held on site. The handheld unit is touched against the location identifier on entering and again on departure from the call and the date, time, location and carer details are automatically recorded. When convenient, the visit information stored in the handheld is downloaded by connecting it to a PC using a cable thereby allowing the production of detailed reports for each employee and location proving time and duration of attendance.

However, as the domiciliary care business grew carer numbers increased. Some were now based in outlying areas where it became difficult to organise a regular trip to the office to download their visit data. Nevertheless as Anne-Marie Perry relays, this problem was resolved and, as she regards, converted into a large positive for Abicare, “We talked the issue through with easyLog and they developed some software that allowed the handhelds to be downloaded to a manager’s laptop when they met up with the carer in the field. From there the data could either be e-mailed from the manager’s home or imported into the main database when they were back in the office. This method means that the carers have regular contact with head office staff, feel involved with the company and not isolated and are constantly assessed and trained to the high standards that we have built our reputation on.”

Increasing Pressure

The expanding number of home visits caused increasing pressure on the company’s manual administrative processes and the decision was taken to computerise the complete function. Again easyLog were involved from the beginning and a phased approach to the task was drawn up, “The result we wanted was simple; Pay carers for what they’ve worked and invoice clients for what we have contracted. With such a complex interaction between these outcomes and the volumes with which we were now dealing, we understood that it had to be broken down into very manageable phases.”, says Anne-Marie Perry.

This methodical approach spanned approximately eighteen months allowing for specification of requirement, development and user comment and testing. It was organised into four stages; the first delivered the recording of contract details together with staff payments. The second and largest phase produced the carer visit rota; here the schedule can be viewed from both the employee visit and service user perspective and any visit exceptions can be identified and reallocated. The third provided a payroll interface so that the analysis of the hours worked at various pay rates would be automatically passed into the company’s Access Dimensions payroll software. The final element was the client invoicing and financial reporting.

easyLog built the resultant care-Log HomeCare application in part from its existing care-Log+ software designed for care home record administration. This brought powerful personnel functionality into the system together with the facilities to define and record risk and health assessments and care plans. The software also utilises palmtop computers (or PDAs) to facilitate easier recording and viewing of data – essential for on-call management staff away from the office - as Anne-Marie Perry explains, “The PDAs have meant that the managers no longer carry around files full of notes about each service user. The software allows us to define our care plan evaluations and these can be completed on a PDA in the service user’s home and then downloaded to the central system.”



No visit overlooked

The growth in the client base has led to the appointment of Area Co-ordinators. These staff have administrative responsibility for an individual area, entering the contract details and assigning carers to service the resultant visit requirements. Some have witnessed the transition from manual to computerised systems so are well-qualified to comment on how things have changed. One such is Lisa Herridge, a former home carer and now co-ordinator for one of Abicare's largest contracts. She has particular praise for the client and employee exceptions function as she explains, "The system will not let me overlook any visit. I run the exceptions function whenever a carer calls in sick or is booked out for holiday or other absence reason. It shows in a separate panel the visits that now require an alternative carer to service them. Likewise after entering new contract details the software highlights the visits that are now needed and the carers available to pick them up. It's done in seconds!"

Clearly a person that is always looking to the future, Anne-Marie Perry sees easyLog as an integral part of that, "The relationship with easyLog is very much a partnership. They have delivered a flexible software product that has helped us to manage and provide a quality care service through the growth that we have achieved. We are always seeking new opportunities and often ask for their input as to how we might use technology to produce efficiencies and cost savings. The discussions are always positive and helpful and clarify what may be possible. A real benefit."