

Five keys to success:

How rural healthcare providers are using technology to improve patient care

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New healthcare delivery models such as telemedicine offer rural providers the promise of increased patient access and improved patient care. However, the adoption of new healthcare delivery models often comes with challenges. Leadership buy-in, clinician buy-in, resource availability and infrastructure limitations can interfere with organizational initiatives to embrace new models of care.

The flip side of these challenges is that these areas of concern can also serve as areas of strength when it comes to adopting new delivery models. HIMSS Analytics recently conducted a survey of rural healthcare providers, on behalf of Spectrum Enterprise.¹ The survey found rural healthcare providers are eager to embrace new delivery models. In fact, more than half (55 percent) of rural providers specifically identified telemedicine as a top organizational priority.²

In the study, titled *Rural Healthcare IT Connectivity and Telecommunication Research*, October 2017, providers who have been successful in implementing new delivery models were asked to identify the areas that contributed to their success. Respondents identified five critical areas of strength: board and/or leadership buy-in; the availability of IT expertise; network reliability; the availability of fiber-based services; and clinician buy-in.

It's notable that three of the top five most critical areas of success identified by respondents directly relate to technology and connectivity. As the IT Director at a provider in Nebraska said: "Connectivity used to be something that was a nice thing to have, but it wasn't necessary. These days, however, reliable connectivity is required to run any business, including healthcare."

Rural providers elaborated on the keys to their success as follows:

- 1 Board and/or leadership buy-in**
 Seventy-one percent of respondents identified board and/or leadership buy-in as their top area of success with respect to enhancing processes, adopting new modes of care and applying new care delivery methods. A number of providers said leadership education is a prerequisite to leadership buy-in. The CIO of a provider in Texas said, "You have to be able to talk to leadership in business terms, not IT terms." If leadership doesn't understand the business context of a problem, it won't become champions of the solution, he said.
- 2 IT expertise availability**
 Sixty-two percent of respondents identified the availability of IT expertise as a critical area of success. Having the right IT team in place is important for supporting new delivery models. The Director of IT at a provider in New Mexico said, "I have the right team now, but getting there was a big hurdle." A number of providers use a combination of in-house IT expertise and external consultants to provide the right IT skill set.



3 Network reliability

Fifty-seven percent of respondents identified network reliability as a critical factor in enabling them to deploy new delivery care models. Having a reliable network in place is essential for supporting telemedicine technology tools, such as two-way audio/video communications and remote patient monitoring. The IT Director of a provider in Maine said: “When our network connection is up, it’s great. But if it goes down, it wreaks a lot of havoc. It wipes out our entire connection to the outside world.”

4 Availability of fiber-based services

Forty-three percent of respondents view the availability of fiber-based connectivity as essential to their success in deploying new delivery models. Providers see fiber connectivity as vital for supporting both existing and emerging modes of care delivery. Almost half of respondents (47 percent) identified future plans for real-time remote examinations, consultations and monitoring as a driver for improving fiber connectivity. The CIO of a provider in Kansas said, “Having fiber in place has helped us tremendously with speed and reliability.”

5 Clinician buy-in

One of three (33 percent) respondents identified clinician buy-in as a key area of success with respect to enhancing processes, adopting new modes of care, and applying new care-delivery methods. As with leadership buy-in, clinician education is essential to engaging clinicians in new modes of care. “End-users, including physicians, aren’t going to adopt new technology just because I tell them it’s cool,” said the Director of IT at a facility in New Mexico. Deploying the “latest and greatest technology” isn’t effective unless you are able to educate clinicians on how new technologies can serve the best interests of both patients and physicians.

With respect to new care delivery models, survey respondents are investigating a number of different opportunities. This includes everything from 24/7 telemedicine consulting capabilities in rural emergency rooms to the virtual delivery of behavioral health services. Rural providers who are able to take these five potential barriers and turn them into strengths will be well-positioned to deploy these new care delivery models.

Learn more about why rural healthcare providers are switching to fiber. [Get the white paper.](#)

¹² Rural Healthcare IT Connectivity and Telecommunication Research, conducted by HIMSS Analytics on behalf of Spectrum Enterprise, October 2017.

About Spectrum Enterprise:

Spectrum Enterprise, a part of Charter Communications, is a national provider of scalable, fiber-based technology solutions serving many of America’s largest businesses and communications service providers. The broad Spectrum Enterprise portfolio includes networking and managed services solutions, including Internet access, Ethernet and Managed Network Services, Voice and TV solutions, Managed Application, Cloud Infrastructure and Managed Hosting Services. Our industry-leading team of experts works closely with clients to achieve greater business success by providing solutions designed to meet their evolving needs. For more information, visit enterprise.spectrum.com.

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