

Tech Alliance Building Database to Address Reimbursement Snag

By Jessica Bylander

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Continua Health Alliance is developing a database of all U.S. and European remote patient monitoring trials conducted in the past five years, a first step toward tackling the remote monitoring reimbursement shortfall.

The group expects to complete the project in about four months, Continua's Board Treasurer Michael Robkin of Kaiser Permanente said during a Sept. 12 teleconference.

The Alliance is partnering with research firm Abt Associates to develop the database of trials such as Medtronic's 2,000-patient CONNECT trial evaluating the cost effectiveness of monitoring ICD patients with Medtronic's CareLink remote monitoring system.

The database marks "the first necessary step" by Continua toward proving the quality and cost effectiveness of remote monitoring technologies.

From there the group plans to meet with both public and private payers "to understand what are the additional barriers that exist to seeking reimbursement for these technologies," said David Whitlinger, director of healthcare Device Interoperability at Intel and chairman of the tech alliance.

He called it "the first cornerstone" in a plan to address reimbursement issues more broadly. Despite a growing interest in remote monitoring from device makers and physicians hoping to mitigate health care costs and address the squeeze on hospital resources, weak reimbursement remains a barrier to the adoption of these systems.

Industry stakeholders are lobbying Congress to require CMS to reimburse doctors for time spent analyzing data transmitted remotely by medical devices for heart failure, cardiac arrhythmia, diabetes, sleep apnea and epilepsy ("Health News Daily" August 20, 2007).

Continua Health Alliance is an international group of technology, health care and fitness companies formed in June 2006 to streamline the various mobile technologies on the market and create a standardized framework for transmitting information to health care providers. Founding members include Medtronic, Philips, Kaiser Permanente and Intel. The group grew from 22 companies to more than 130 in its first year.

The group focuses on chronic disease management, aging patient care and everyday health and fitness, and electronic devices ranging from pacemakers and pedometers to PDAs.

Since 2006, Continua worked to finalize its Version One Guidelines. These standards were selected over the summer and should be published in early 2008, the group said.

The framework is based on USB and Bluetooth wireless technologies and various international clinical data recordkeeping standards.

Members' products will be branded and marketed under the Continua logo, provided they meet the Version One Guidelines. This will make it easy for consumers to know if different devices will work together, Whitlinger explained.

Remote monitoring systems currently on the market include Medtronic's CareLink and CareLink PRO for cardiac care and diabetes management, Biotronik's Home Monitoring and IEGM Online, Boston Scientific's Latitude, St. Jude's HouseCall Plus, and MedApps' d-PAL remote monitoring system for diabetics.