
INSIDE DISEASE MANAGEMENT

Insurers, DM Firms Move to Fewer Sources Of Health Content to Support Enrollees

Health insurers and disease management companies increasingly are consolidating the number of vendors supplying health content for chronically ill enrollees. Rather than using several vendors to provide different types of material, companies like WellPoint, Inc. and American Healthways, Inc. are starting to use one source for the majority of health educational needs. Purchasers and suppliers of health content say it's easier to manage fewer vendors, since there are fewer sources to consider when integrating that material with internal DM information and making the information available in a variety of formats.

But some DM programs, such as those operated by Aetna, Inc. and Blue Shield of California, still use a variety of suppliers of health content. Others, such as Horizon Blue Cross Blue Shield of New Jersey, develop all health content for DM programs internally.

DM programs use content to help educate enrollees about their chronic conditions. Increasingly, DM programs rely on both online encyclopedia materials from organizations like Healthwise or A.D.A.M., Inc., and virtual health coaching programs such as those offered by firms like HealthMedia, Inc.

American Healthways, Inc. on Oct. 11 unveiled a five-year agreement with Healthwise, under which the two organizations will develop a virtual health coach to support healthy behaviors and lifestyle decisions. The two parties did not disclose terms of the deal. The agreement extends a relationship formed a few months earlier, says Mark Murray, senior vice president of business development at Healthwise. The not-for-profit organization already is supplying American Healthways with printed patient education materials and an online health encyclopedia that is used in the DM company's Internet portal and in call centers.

The DM firm previously used other content providers, including Krames, a unit of MediMedia USA. "We have consolidated to a large extent on the Healthwise Knowledgebase," says American Healthways Executive Vice President Robert Stone. "It's easier when you can get everything that you need from one principal source," he notes. It allows the DM firm to offer "a uniform look and feel, a uniform tone and messaging [and] a uniform depth of information."

"A lot of these companies are trying to consolidate around one content source," Murray says. That way,

"they don't have to worry about both medical consistency and managing a number of different health content providers, both contractually and supporting them technologically," he explains.

WellPoint on July 15 said it signed a three-year contract with WebMD Health, under which the firm's online health platform and content will be integrated into WellPoint's personalized member Web site. Terms of the deal were not disclosed. WellPoint spokesperson Todd Siesky says the insurer already has begun integrating WebMD's online health tools with the MCO's DM programs.

For example, WellPoint's disease managers customized WebMD content to align with its DM programs, he says. The insurer also intends to use the WebMD content to generate online reminders for DM enrollees and allow them to use WebMD tools to track health statistics such as blood pressure.

"We will leverage that [content] down the road," says Jeff Odell, vice president of sales and marketing at WellPoint's DM subsidiary, Health Management Corp. (HMC). He said a timetable for integration of WebMD content with HMC's DM programs has not yet been established. HMC declines to describe its current sources of health content.

Aetna Uses Variety of Content Sources

Other insurers rely on several content sources, however. Aetna uses a variety of content vendors to support its internally managed DM programs for chronic heart failure, diabetes, coronary artery disease, asthma, low-back pain and healthy weight, says Dana Smith, Aetna's marketing manager for the DM programs. The insurer contracts with LifeMasters Supported SelfCare, Inc., to provide a high-touch nursing component for the chronic heart failure and diabetes programs.

Aetna uses Joslin Diabetes Center for diabetes-related content and National Jewish Medical and Research Center for asthma-related material, for example, as well as Krames for general disease and condition information.

Aetna also uses content from Healthwise and the insurer's own IntelliHealth Web site.

"There are so many good sites out there, and if you're going to teach content, then you should go to the experts," Smith says.

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Historically, DM firms have been competitors as well as clients of content providers, Murray says. "Often, they're writing information themselves." But that is becoming less common, he says, as technological advances allow for more ways to reach patients. "Most of these companies have found that it's very difficult for them to cost-effectively write across all these different delivery options, from the Web to print to call centers," he says. As a result, DM firms turn to organizations like Healthwise, if not as a primary source of information, then as an addition, he contends.

However, WebMD Health Executive Vice President Craig Froude says it's "pretty rare" for WebMD to find itself in competition with DM firms. "Every day, we have 150 people creating content," allowing for constantly updated information, he says.

Some DM Firms Purchase Content Providers

Not only are some DM firms looking to consolidate the number of content providers they work with, but some also are purchasing those companies outright. Matria Healthcare, Inc., for example, in March 2005 purchased Miavita LLC, a provider of online health programs that include a personalized curriculum.

"There's a huge interest in consolidation going on right now," says Ted Dacko, CEO of Ann Arbor, Mich.-based HealthMedia, Inc. "You'll probably find that two or three more large DM firms are going to buy health promotion Web-based companies. We have seen a huge amount of interest from organizations in HealthMedia," he adds. "Our preference at this point in time is to remain indepen-

dent." HealthMedia has been backed by venture capital firms since its inception seven years ago, Dacko says.

HealthMedia provides tailored self-management programs for lifestyle issues, diseases and conditions. The firm works with health plans including Kaiser Permanente and Highmark, Inc. and DM firms such as Health Dialog Services Corp., SHPS, Inc. and Alere Medical, Inc., Dacko says.

HealthMedia typically charges a capitated fee for use of its programs, he adds, but he declines to give specific figures.

Some insurers use HealthMedia material to support participants with lower acuity levels. "Our health care plan customers use us more as an intervention strategy than as a pure content play," Dacko says. "They recognize that...in DM there is a gigantic hole between having a nurse counselor on the phone and sticking generic content up on the Web site."

Clients also use HealthMedia to reach members with higher acuity who can't be contacted telephonically, or for use by counselors in educational efforts with enrollees, Dacko says.

At WebMD, "everyone uses our core content and some of their own custom content that they want to get out" to fit with each firm's specific DM goals, says Froude. "100% of the time, it's a blend." Healthwise supplies WebMD's core content, which is supplemented with other sources, Murray says.

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