

Bamboo Health



FAMILIES FIRST:

How Real-Time Data Keeps Hospice Patients Home

 **Hospice News**

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Background

The decision to transition to hospice care is a very emotional and personal one for individuals and family members. Too often, however, something happens to disrupt that choice, causing patients to be abruptly shifted away from their preferred care path.

Hospice providers play a critical role in ensuring their patients do not undergo unwarranted breaks in the continuum of care. In many cases, time is of the essence. Technology solutions that provide real-time alerts when patients experience a medical emergency — or move to a different facility or stage of care — can help hospice care teams know when to intervene. The goal is to make sure patients continue to receive the best care in the best location, offering them the most comfort and the best quality of life, in accordance with their wishes.

Care coordination platform Bamboo Health (formerly PatientPing) is one such solution. It issues notifications, or “Pings,” when a patient presents to — or is admitted to, discharged from or transferred into — a hospital, emergency department (ED), or other care facility. To assure the most appropriate care and avoid or minimize a patient’s time in high-acuity settings, hospice providers benefit from real-time notifications under three key scenarios.



Scenario 1: **A Medical Emergency Occurs**



Scenario 2: **A Patient Transitions to a Different Care Site**



Scenario 3: **A Patient Transitions to a Different Stage of Care**

Bamboo Health has a national care coordination network of more than 2,500 hospitals and nearly 8,000 post-acute care providers. Through its platform, Bamboo Health helps hospice providers manage their patient populations and reduce rising healthcare costs by seamlessly connecting providers across the continuum with real-time patient data.

This white paper discusses how alert systems aid hospice providers in coordinating care in each of these scenarios to keep patients at home or in another preferred hospice setting as much as possible. It also reveals how hospice providers can avoid revocation of a patient’s hospice coverage by insurers.





Scenario 1: A Medical Emergency Occurs

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- Anthony Keough,
National Director of
Post-Acute, Bamboo Health
(formerly PatientPing)

Sudden changes in a patient’s condition — such as a shift in their breathing or other vital signs — can be understandably alarming for patients, family members and loved ones. Frightened patients or family members may instinctively call 911 for emergency care. Once that happens, the hospice provider has minimal time to intercede on their patient’s behalf to ensure care continuity.

Alert systems like Bamboo Health’s Pings solution notify hospice providers when a patient arrives in an ED. Hospice clinicians can then respond quickly to coordinate with ED clinicians and staff to assess the patient’s needs and determine the optimal course of care.

“Hospice providers can receive a real-time alert when a patient on service presents in an ED anywhere on the Pings network,” says Anthony Keough, National Director of Post-Acute at Bamboo Health (formerly PatientPing). “Knowing this information in real time allows the hospice agency to evaluate the situation and see if a hospital readmission is preventable.”

Without the alerts, there likely is no coordination with hospice providers. If those patients then are admitted to high-acuity settings, their care shifts from strictly palliative to curative treatments aimed at trying to sustain or prolong life, sometimes regardless of quality-of-life concerns. This can run counter to patients’ wishes when they initially opted to receive compassionate end-of-life care to help manage pain or symptoms for an advanced, life-limiting illness.



Scenario 2: A Patient Transitions to a Different Care Site



In addition to providing alerts when a patient presents in an ED, the systems notify hospice providers when a patient is admitted, transferred, or discharged at other care sites. With Bamboo Health, the alert is sent via SMS texting, email, or through the company's web application. The "Pings" indicate the patient's location and status in real time so hospice providers can allocate clinicians to respond as needed.

They often have to respond swiftly. If a patient is admitted to a hospital or other acute-care setting, it can trigger revocation of their Medicare hospice benefit in order to move them to acute care coverage. The hospice provider then loses the ability to assist in guiding the individual's care, and patients may end up on a path of receiving unwanted, aggressive treatments intended to fight serious illness rather than ease suffering.

To help prevent these unfortunate, all-too-common circumstances, hospice providers should keep patients and family members informed of the full breadth of their services, and what to expect from serious illness and end-of-life care measures.

"Educating the patient and their family about the all-inclusive set of services that are provided by choosing your hospice agency is so important," Keough says. "That conversation has to happen early and often so there is an understanding that the patient doesn't need to go back to the hospital. Their hospice providers are equipped and able to address their needs."

THE FINANCIAL BURDEN OF UNWARRANTED REVOCATION

Unwarranted revocation of hospice benefits presents a heavy financial burden for patients, hospice providers and the overall health care system. According to the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, 144.8 million ED visits nationwide racked up \$76.3 billion in costs in 2017, with the average visit costing more than twice as much for patients age 65 and older. This age group represents the bulk of hospice recipients.



REVOCATIONS CAN RAISE REGULATORY CONCERNS

In addition to ensuring continuity of care for patients, alert systems such as Bamboo Health's Pings solution also help hospice providers better manage their overall patient populations. It gives hospice providers the tools to monitor a patient's movement along the care continuum, and avoid inappropriate discharges or revocations of Medicare hospice benefits that may raise red flags for regulators.

Because hospice is an end-of-life benefit, hospice providers with high rates of live discharges frequently trigger audits by regulators such as the U.S. Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services or the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Inspector General.

Some level of live discharges are to be expected due to a variety of circumstances. According to 2020 National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization (NHPCO) statistics, U.S. hospice providers discharged 221,000 Medicare beneficiaries prior to death in 2018, representing 17% of all hospice discharges.

Regulators become involved when they see high rates of discharges because they may "be an indicator of poor quality of care or of provider misuse of the [hospice] benefit, in that the hospice may be enrolling beneficiaries who are not eligible for hospice care," the Government Accountability Office (GAO) wrote in its October 2019 U.S. Senate report. The GAO reported 472 hospice providers had live discharge rates of 50% or more in 2017. With real-time alert solutions, hospice providers can better manage preventable live discharges to avert loss of patients and revenue, and ward off undue regulatory concerns.



Hospice Discharges in 2018

85,800 were patient-initiated revocations.

81,900 were due to patients being determined no longer terminally ill.

28,600 were patient-initiated transfers.

20,800 moved out of the hospice provider's service area.

3,900 were discharged for cause.



Scenario 3: A Patient Transitions to a Different Stage of Care



As patients move along their care journey through an array of settings — including skilled nursing and long-term care facilities — alert systems such as Bamboo Health’s Pings solution help hospice providers stay informed of their patients’ moves. Hospice clinicians can stay actively engaged in ensuring proper care coordination and collaboration for those individuals.

The Pings solution tracks a patient’s location and delivers up-to-date contact information for patients and their providers. This facilitates rapid communication among patients, families and hospice clinicians when there is a change in a patient’s status. Hospice clinicians can then coordinate to assess the situation and determine whether transitioning the patient to another stage of care is clinically necessary.

For example, a cancer patient with a terminal diagnosis may be receiving palliative care through the hospice provider to treat their symptoms and keep them as comfortable as possible while still undergoing chemotherapy treatment. At some point, the patient and their family may decide to stop the aggressive treatments aimed at trying to cure their cancer, and transition to hospice to focus on palliative end-of-life care.

Notification systems like Pings give hospice agencies the opportunity to connect with palliative care patients further upstream in their illness

trajectories, and open the door to hospice when they decide to cease curative treatments. This type of care coordination also creates opportunities to foster referral partnerships with skilled nursing or long-term care facilities, Keough says.

“Patients on service with a hospice for palliative care would be in the Bamboo Health system, so the hospice provider can stay informed and help that patient transition to the company’s hospice services when they are ready for hospice care,” he says. “This keeps the patient in-network where they are most familiar with the patient, their care history, their family dynamics, and home environment. This also prevents them from being discharged to another provider.”

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Conclusion

National statistics show that many patients are either not receiving hospice care at all, or are receiving hospice care for too short a time to benefit from the services. Only about half of Medicare recipients are enrolled in hospice at the time of death, and nearly 30% of those enrolled in hospice benefits receive them for seven days or less, according to the latest data from the NHCPO.

That means that too many patients are dying without an opportunity for a better quality of life and better quality time with loved ones in their final weeks of life.

Real-time alerts through Bamboo Health or other solutions can help hospice providers keep patients out of high-acuity settings if clinically appropriate, or return them to their preferred hospice care site as soon as possible following needed high-acuity care. In addition, Bamboo Health's Pings solution can help hospice providers:

- **Strengthen referral relationships** with accountable care organizations and health system partners by providing visibility into patient care transitions.
- **Properly allocate field staff** by identifying where patients are in real time.
- **Receive real-time notifications on patients' care events** to maintain continuity as they move along the care continuum.





Hospice providers are motivated every day by their mission to ease patients' suffering and provide the highest quality of life possible for those in the final stages of terminal illness. Quick and efficient care collaboration solutions such as Pings can help hospices strengthen communication, avoid revocations, lower healthcare costs, and ensure optimal and coordinated treatment for patients and families when they need it most.

To learn more about how this unique blend of technology and provider relationships can dramatically improve hospice performance, contact connect@bamboohealth.com or visit www.bamboohealth.com.





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