Innovating healthcare with field service

With Virtual Health Platform, instant efficiencies lie ready and waiting.
In the Netherlands, €95 billion every year is spent on healthcare costs. That’s 13 per cent of the GDP; if nothing changes, it will grow to 31 per cent in 2040. Escalating costs aren’t the only crisis the Dutch healthcare sector is facing. Professionals are walking away from healthcare, and leaving an ever-expanding number of job vacancies in their wake. There’s also a rapidly growing base of Dutch senior citizens. With the brewing storm of these combined concerns, it’s clear that an epic change is needed to save the system.

Technological innovation has the promise to deliver that change, with more and better patient data, smoother care delivery systems, more efficient caregiver scheduling and enhanced communication between patients and providers. But in the Netherlands, the home care industry is an outlier when it comes to uptake of that innovation; there is enormous opportunity for caregivers, and their patients, to start making use of savvy, available technology solutions.

**Inefficient planning and technological limitations:** Currently used software makes flexibility in scheduling difficult. Software failures, compounded by a lack of offline functionality and ‘smart’ scheduling, are breeding inefficiencies in routes and processes.

**High care demand, low staff numbers:** Too many appointments (and too many routes between them) squeeze the capacity of short-staffed teams, especially those providing specialised home care.

**Very limited staff participation:** Field service caregivers (especially new ones) have little influence on the routes they’re assigned or when their working days start or finish. Vocalising their preferences for type of care often isn’t even an option.

**Lack of insight and efficiency:** Managers, district nurses and caregivers don’t have the visibility and real-time data that could increase the effectiveness and efficiency of tasks and routes.

These frustrations extend to the patient, as well, who lacks the power to know exactly when their care will occur or to reschedule appointments. The technology to mitigate these problems exists.

Salesforce Field Service, as applied to home care, is the result of a shared vision and collaboration between Deloitte and Salesforce. This efficiency solution is part of the Virtual Health Platform, and is built with technology that’s proven itself in other industries. Salesforce Field Service comprises apps and smart data analysis that enable efficient scheduling (including self-scheduling), and includes a customisable advanced optimisation engine.

The tool presents a unique 360-degree view of the patient that’s informed by securely handled patient data. A step beyond traditional EHR systems, Salesforce Field Service is smart, flexible technology that empowers caregivers to manage their time well, travel smartly, and handle emergencies swiftly and efficiently. It has obvious potential for boosting staff satisfaction, which could help retain employees who may be thinking of leaving.

The caregiver uses an integrated mobile app, which features a user-friendly interface and algorithms that field incoming information and streamline the caregiver’s schedule in real time. The patient, or their family member, is able to easily access and navigate their personal health data and care schedules. The head nurse’s platform interface presents a calendar view, among other features, which they use to efficiently design the care schedules.

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**Stuck in the present: Dutch home care as we know it**

Before we get into solutions, let’s consider the specific struggles of Dutch home care providers – the day-to-day frustrations that undoubtedly contribute to caregivers’ decisions to walk away:
The immediate impacts of person-centred technology

The direct benefits of Salesforce Field Service can reverberate throughout an entire home care organisation, and all the way to the patients and their families. Let’s start with the impact on them, because their needs are at the very epicentre of the Virtual Health Platform.

Insight and a voice for patients

By indicating their preferences for a visit (which time, which caregiver), making their own appointments through the app, and having insight into their care moments and care plan, the patient gains more of a say in their care. They also learn of last-minute changes immediately, and are assigned shorter, more specific timeframes for visits, as caregivers’ routes are optimised. Their care is more consistent and of higher quality, and they may even experience less loneliness, being able to decide when they’d like a visit.

Streamlined schedules

Fragmented, scattered schedules disappear with the extremely powerful Salesforce Field Service planning and optimisation engine. Adding extra hours here and there is easy, and caregivers are shown the most efficient routes between patients. Daily activities that can’t be assigned to a specific client – education, meetings, administration or similar tasks – can be performed digitally and remotely, saving hours that are better spent on delivering quality care.

One-stop staff solution

Just a single app addresses all aspects of a caregiver’s job, turning stress points into productive, rewarding moments. The caregiver uses the app to indicate preferences for certain shifts. They use the same app to manage, schedule and optimise care plans – and make quick changes based on digital alerts of emergencies, illness, injuries, new patients or deaths. And they turn to the app when they need to communicate with colleagues or patients.

Admin made easy

The Virtual Health Platform eases the administrative burden that sits with head nurses, through a constant and growing bank of data. They can better manage needs and assignments by gauging what works and what doesn’t. Is the morning slot still available for that patient? Is a certain task better suited for a caregiver of a different skill level? All staff, throughout the organisation, can see the same information from EHR and other vital systems, and are connected via the platform – a holistic approach that opens the door for company-wide efficiency.

Time savings add up

Using Salesforce Field Service can vary 6 to 8 % more hours from a caregiver’s schedule.

The estimated reduction in travel time is the equivalent of 3.9 % to 5.4 % of all yearly billable hours, with travel time being the largest chunk. An additional reduction of absenteeism could lead up to 1 % more billable hours. And because team members will no longer be responsible for creating care schedules (thanks to the tool’s ‘self scheduling’), up to another 2 % in extra billable hours is possible. This data comes from Deloitte Digital’s project experience.
Behind-the-scenes benefits

One beautiful aspect of data-based technology is its continual self-improvement as time goes on. After Salesforce Field Service is implemented, new insights will be revealed as the system gathers patient and care data. That wealth of data can also be shared outside your company’s walls, such as with other organisations in your region that could improve their care, for less cost, if they had the right data.

At the heart of it all are the patients, who may not realise how or why a virtual health solution has improved their lives, but the evidence is there. Digital tools enable many patients to avoid hospital visits—lowering healthcare costs, and maybe even preventing their health from deteriorating faster. They’re happiest at home, after all, even if they enjoy regular visits from a home caregiver.

The future of the healthcare sector is holistic
integrated and connected, hybrid (but digital led) and personalised,
and home care is no exception.

It’s time to bring to healthcare field service the same time- and cost-saving technological innovations that are allowing other industries to thrive.
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Sophia’s day with standard EHR-based tools

At a daily in-person meeting with her whole team, Sophia discusses some problems and sick reports: special needs of patients and outstanding tasks. She learns her schedule of visits for the day, and sets off for the first one.

Even from her first patient visit, Sophia has to improvise a lot while administering care, because she’s not sure of all of the patient’s history. She also receives many calls on her phone with a wide variety of requests, ranging from emergencies to calls that are not even intended for her. And she struggles to manage information and messages coming from four different apps that are not linked to each other.

Sophia receives calls from the head nurse throughout the day, re-assigning her to other patients as needs change. Stuck in traffic for long periods of time on her way to appointments, she tries to plan new routes to gain back some lost time.

Sophia heads back to the office later than planned, as the travel time ate into her schedule and she had to make an emergency visit to a patient on the other side of her district.

Sophia begins a long list of administrative tasks in the office, noticing that she’s entering overtime hours. As she records the day’s tasks performed, she wonders whether any of them have provided the outcomes she expected. She has no way of knowing.

Before leaving for the day, Sophia checks the schedule for the coming week, and notices that she’s been re-assigned a shift that will prevent her from attending her son’s parent-teacher conference on Friday: unfortunately, it’s too late for her to request a schedule change now.

Edwin’s day with Salesforce Field Service

Edwin starts his day by scanning all his messages in his mobile app. All priority situations and changes have been automatically communicated to Edwin, along with the best possible route for today’s home visits. Before setting off, he uses the app to send a few responses to colleagues and a patient.

Edwin makes his first home visit and looks through all the necessary care-related tasks and information about his patient in the app. This is information from the EHR, but also other information as known to his employer and healthcare organisation partners, such as about previous visits by his colleagues. He is guided in making smart choices by the data he easily reads via the app’s dashboards and reports. He gets recommendations for performing tasks, creating care plans and planning follow-up actions.

Edwin’s day proceeds smoothly as he visits other patients. Just as he is leaving one of them, he receives a message via a wearable device on a patient in his district: their blood sugar curve is too high. He immediately delegates the task to a colleague who can see him nearby. This kind of message is the only kind the app sends him: urgent shift/ route updates or emergencies. Any other patient requests are handled by the Digital Human via the patient portal or the patient service team.

After each visit, Edwin uses a feature of the app to record his voice describing performed and planned tasks; the app automatically transcribes his voice to text. Near the end of his shift, Edwin heads back to the office to finish administrative tasks, like making changes to care plans and enrolling new patients. Just then, an emergency video call comes in. Edwin takes the call and provides virtual care to a team in the neighbourhood, talking them through a complicated medical procedure.

To finish his day, Edwin checks the schedule for the coming week and enters his preferences for a shorter shift on Friday and a longer one on Saturday.
Sources:


This is the first part of the Virtual Health Platform series: a set of solutions built by Deloitte Digital Health with the Salesforce platform.