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Pharmacy *Today*



Don Thibodeau, BPharm, uses PillHelp software to enhance his medication therapy management practice.

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Don Thibodeau: Using software to unite pharmacists

*PillHelp incorporates
philosophy of practice
into daily routine*

"You are the drug expert in this town." With those words, a pharmacy professor at Massachusetts College of Pharmacy changed the course of young man's career—and with it, perhaps, helped stimulate creation of software and a system of care that might someday be used by many.

Wherever he has practiced since that day in a 1974 pharmaceuticals/dispensing laboratory, Don Thibodeau, BPharm, has never forgotten that his role—and that of all pharmacists—on the health care team is to be the one whom others call on for the facts on medication therapy. His current inspiration flows from that philosophy. The PillHelp Company (www.pillhelp.com) "is designed to bring pharmacists together in one network where we can support and empower each other with information and medication therapy management (MTM) services," Thibodeau told **Today** in a January interview.

Carrying a black computer bag

With 30 years in community and hospital pharmacy practice to guide him, Thibodeau, who will complete his PharmD in May 2007, spends his time calling on patients in their south-Florida homes, conducting medication reviews, and coaching patients toward clinical goals. The first visit normally takes an hour to an hour and a half, and Thibodeau said that most of the follow-up can be completed by telephone or fax.

During his patient visits, Thibodeau uses the PillHelp Works software, which he has been refining for a decade. Documentation is a particular strength of the software, a feature important for billing but also key in a practice in which physicians are routinely contacted and nearly every patient is referred back to a community pharmacist.

Billing patients and insurers on a flat hourly basis, Thibodeau sees four to six patients per day, works 4 days per week, and averages 24 billable hours per week. Most patients are referred by their physicians, while others self-refer in an effort to gain more control over their medications, reduce the costs of those drugs, or optimize regimens with an eye toward increased effectiveness. MTM services under Medicare Part D have driven interest in PillHelp's services, but Thibodeau's patient base includes many middle-aged patients, in addition to the largely geriatric Fort Myers population. Some patients are residents of long-term care facilities.



A recent, somewhat unusual consult involved a woman who self-referred because of headaches, general malaise, and depression refractory to treatment for 2 years. After working through the patient's clinical, social, and medication histories, Thibodeau deduced that the woman and her family were suffering from sick-house syndrome as a result of Hurricane Charlie, with the patient experiencing the most severe symptoms.

agents, and other dietary supplements, as well as a source for finding regimen alternatives, educating patients about adherence to prescribed therapies, and improving outcomes.

In addition to its clinical features, the PillHelp Works software provides infrastructure that helps pharmacists get from A to Z in an encounter with a patient reliably and with a high level of quality. Currently in version 3 and

there is a small monthly fee. Thibodeau explained, "Pharmacists who use PillHelp Works have everything they need to provide a high-level and repeatable quality of MTM services and to experience this separate form of revenue."

PillHelp Works manages workflow, provides documentation templates, automatically tracks time, and archives the user's work. As a result, the consults are effective and make efficient use of time.

Benefiting patients

Thibodeau believes that, overall, his services decrease the cost of patients' health care while also lowering the stress they have about unresolved problems or medication adverse effects. For every dollar spent on MTM services, Thibodeau calculates that the patient saves \$16 on other medical expenses, such as trips to the emergency department, additional medications, and extra trips to the physician's office. For example, he recently consulted with a 49-year-old patient regarding the adverse effects of cardiac medications. He registered the patient into PillHelp Works and, after the initial meeting, faxed an introductory letter and medical release form to the patient's cardiologist and primary care physician. After receiving a copy of the patient's lab work from the cardiologist, Thibodeau faxed back a Suggested Care Plan created with the help of templates embedded in PillHelp Works. A copy was provided to the patient's primary care physician.

The cardiologist accepted and implemented Thibodeau's suggestions. At a 90-day follow-up, the patient expressed satisfaction and ease in the use of her new medication regimen. She was no longer experiencing adverse effects and was grateful for the education that she had received about her medications. She told Thibodeau that the stress she had felt about her cardiac event had diminished significantly. Her primary care physician commented that her post-myocardial infarction medication adjustments had taken about one-third the time of conventional follow-up visits.

Thibodeau estimated that the patient's insurance provider had averted, at a minimum, the cost of two cardiologist visits, two primary care physician office visits, and one set of laboratory assays. The estimated cost of those office visits was approximately



Colette Thibodeau is office manager for husband Don's busy MTM practice.

From patients to pharmacists

Because of his belief that the PillHelp software provides a sound way to approach both clinical practice and case management, Thibodeau has begun offering to license the program to other pharmacists wanting to establish an MTM or clinically based practice. Currently, two other pharmacists—Suzette M. Robine, BPharm, CPh, of Fort Myers, Fla., and Richard A. Marasco, BPharm, FASCP, CGP, of Valdosta, Ga.—are partnering with Thibodeau to refine the software through their own experiences in daily practice and in marketing the package to fellow pharmacists.

For practitioners, PillHelp is a resource for information on prescription and nonprescription medications, herbal

in the process of going on the market, PillHelp Works provides pharmacists with an MTM services office, complete with charting, documentation, and fee processing. According to Thibodeau, it guides the pharmacist "from demographics to deposit."

Using the software, pharmacists can make progress notes; gather data; print out fax forms, care plans, and PillHelp Talking Points; and store patient information on a HIPAA-compliant secure server. The pharmacist can also make notes on the invoice so the patient is reminded of what the pharmacist is doing for them. Signing up with PillHelp Works can be done through the PillHelp Web site. The licensing fee includes the full program, Web infrastructure, and secure communication tools. After that,

\$1,000—more than double the amount of Thibodeau's billings.

A growing opportunity

Thibodeau sees himself as a part of a larger group—the health care team—looking after the well-being of the patient. He comes to the table with suggestions and ideas for the physician and provides information to make his or her job easier. As the numbers of software licensees grow, Thibodeau hopes to have several pharmacists in every state on his Web site who are providing MTM services. He stated, "What I want is to make pharmacists realize they can use their skills and education to expand care and be profoundly effective—in other words, to be the drug expert in their towns."

—Kristin Hodges and
L. Michael Posey, BPharm



Don Thibodeau regularly visits Theresa Schlosser and her daughter Sarah Hall to check on Hall's medications.

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