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Provider uses technology to cut costs and increase independence for people with disabilities

Ask nearly any disability services provider in Minnesota what the future holds, and most will tell you that the state's disability services must undergo a major transformation in the coming years. The pool of qualified employees is shrinking, and cuts to Minnesota's Health and Human Services (HHS) budget are ongoing. More significantly, about 70 percent of Medicaid spending is driven by services to older adults and people with disabilities, and the Medicaid total spending is projected to mushroom to over \$700 billion by 2017.¹

To overcome these obstacles, one solution Minnesota disability providers are touting is using remote monitoring technology when appropriate in lieu of staff for overnight sleep supervision. The 2009 Monitoring Technology legislation was a part of the Association of Residential Resources in Minnesota's (ARRM) transformation plan, which encourages greater flexibility and innovation while delivering the appropriate level of care to people with disabilities.

How it works

About three years ago, Dungarvin Minnesota, a provider of licensed adult foster care services for people with disabilities, decided to try this approach. The organization installed sensors and monitors in five of its seven homes in the Lake St./Hiawatha Ave. area of South Minneapolis.

Four people, who have a diagnosis of either a traumatic brain injury (TBI) or cerebral palsy, reside at each home. Because the 35 individuals in this cluster of homes must receive 24-

¹ Data from Barbara Coulter Edwards, principal at Health Management Associates.

hour supervision, the monitoring technology - delivered by a metro-area company called [Sengistix](#) - consists of motion sensors in each room and one camera in the shared living area.

The sensors and personal call lines can be activated manually or using an automatic trigger. When activated, they notify a staff person who immediately responds to the call. Sensors on the medication cabinets also alert staff when the time to give medication has passed.

A variety of benefits

According to Dawn Smith, a program director at Dungarvin, the benefits of monitoring technology outweigh the company's initial investment. "Using this technology [contains costs](#)," she said, "especially for people whose needs have changed." Rather than paying staff to sleep or stay awake overnight, the sensors and camera alert a float staff when something is wrong. Because the program records how quickly employees handle a call, Smith says the new system has increased staff responsiveness.

Both Hiawatha residents and Dungarvin staff were initially hesitant to use this technology, but have come to appreciate it for a variety of reasons. First, the new technology promotes independence and is less intrusive than a staff person. In some cases, residents no longer need the same level of supervision and can move to less restrictive environments. Second, Dungarvin employees say the technology helps them remember to give residents their medication at the correct time, and verifies that they have completed required personal care duties. Finally, Dungarvin's upper management likes the system because it produces detailed, comprehensive reports every morning. As a result, supervisors spend less time investigating resident complaints.

Although county case managers were initially hesitant to endorse monitoring technology, Smith says many are now on board with the concept. They have come to realize that technology can increase privacy, safety and quality care.

Several providers of adult foster care currently use this technology in Duluth, Winona, Minneapolis, and the Twin Cities. According to Smith, there is a waiting list for openings in Dungarvin's Hiawatha homes that use monitoring technology.

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