

Develop a master technology plan that helps you meet all of your needs.

My fifth grade teacher used to say, “Keep it simple,” and you can do the same. All of your documentation should live in one place where it can be shared appropriately and securely throughout the entire facility. It should flow through your financial and billing departments, right into your financial outcomes. This is something you simply cannot achieve by having dozens of disjointed technology pieces floating around your organization. Develop a master technology plan that helps you meet all of your needs.

STEP BY STEP

Have as few vendors as possible. More vendors add complexity and you want to spend time on the residents, not trying to manage dozens of vendors and technologies every day. It takes away valuable time and effort that can be put to better use. It is also important, especially in these economic times, to check out the financial strength and other customer experiences of vendors so you don’t discover any surprises down the road.

Start with an expansive and integrated core system. Make sure that the core system you’re buying can handle your operations today and in the future. You can always turn off features you don’t need today, but it will be much harder (and expensive) to add features to a system later. If the vendor claims to have a feature, they should be able to show it to you. If not, then you know they’re trying to sell you “vapor ware,” or software that hasn’t even been created yet. They should tell you upfront that they don’t have the feature and then it’ll be up to you to decide if you want to wait for it or not. Keep in mind that new features aren’t always 100 percent perfect the first time around, so you might be waiting quite a while.

Beware of different definitions of integration. Some vendors will promise an integrated clinical and financial system, only for you to find out later that what they really have is an interface to a different financial system by another vendor that’s not suited to long-term ►

➔ The Big Picture

Make the right software decisions for your facility by following a master technology plan. BY DON FRAZIER

Ask any veteran billing manager who’s been working with paper her entire life: Technology can seem like a very complicated burden of extra acronyms and techno speak. At least until a light pops and the big picture comes into focus.

Technology can help you streamline operations by simplifying two important elements: resident care and billing. Software can improve resident quality of life and outcomes by making care recommendations and documenting that they were done with real-time accessibility.

Technology also greatly affects the facility’s financials. You simply can’t ignore the fact that reimbursement is what allows you to stay in business.

A MASTER PLAN

So how do you reach that moment of enlightenment that allows you to see past the confusion and embrace technology? First, understand that the basis for resistance often comes from within your own organiza-

tion. The clinical staff, MDS coordinator, billing staff, rehab staff, home health staff, physicians, pharmacy, financial staff and others all are separate entities with their own agendas and requirements.

To get the big picture, you need to float above the day-to-day activities of your particular role. Try seeing things from the residents’ perspective. They require assistance of some kind or another from each department, but they often must re-communicate their needs to each one to achieve their own big picture—a dignified life as they define it.

To be a truly resident-centered facility, use technology to make sure that each resident’s big picture is shared appropriately at every necessary level of the organization. We often talk about MARs, TARs, MDS, ADLs, care plans and RUGs. These are all smaller components of the larger picture that comes with a technology tool. If you buy a few different tools to satisfy the needs of each component individually, you’re missing the target entirely.

care because it was written for generic industries. An integrated system is built by one vendor, not by different vendors.

Question the need for any interfaces. In reality, you will need interfaces to address some parts of the puzzle that come through different vendors, but this can be a slippery slope. The goal is to limit the number of interfaces necessary between different soft-

ware companies to keep your IT footprint as small as possible. You can only do this by selecting a system that has a significant core of features. You might have interfaces to other systems, such as pharmacy and hospital systems that aren't within the core, and that's fine. You just don't want multiple interfaces to be the primary way to access all of the functionality you need.

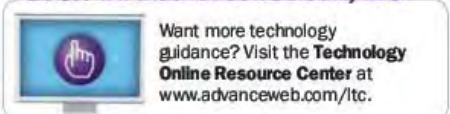
Realize that the sum of the parts doesn't equal the whole. Some vendors may try to sell you on the "best of breed" concept, meaning that you should have many different vendors each with their own specialty to get to the best possible solution for your facility. While it's an interesting theory, what you really get when you put too many different breeds together is an ugly mutt. Instead of this Frankenstein approach, stick to your master technology plan of limited vendors, limited interfaces and working with a core system that has all of the necessary functionality you need. It will pay off in the end by positively affecting the two things that matter most: your residents and your bottom line.

Recognize that the software isn't enough. You're not just buying software; you're buying a small piece of the company that's offering you the software. It's your responsibility to conduct due diligence, as you would with any other investment. Ask your vendor what level of technical support is available. Ideally, you want a support technician team that has separate specialists in the financial and clinical areas. Ask for their specialists' biographies to determine if they have industry experience and would be capable of understanding your organization's real needs. Find out how often the system is upgraded and how soon you can expect regulatory requirements to be implemented. Ensure that there's ample hands-on, onsite training and accessibility to trainers to suit your organization's needs. Purchasing a software system without adequate training is tantamount to throwing your organization's money away.

So when the next vendor comes knocking on your door with the latest technological do-dah that you simply must buy, ask them how it fits into your master technology plan and the residents' big picture. You can then stop worrying about the technological aspects and spend more time caring for your organization and its residents. ■

Don Frazier is the vice president of professional services at AOD Software, Fort Lauderdale, Fla. DISCLOSURE: AOD Software provides software to the long-term care industry.

Go to: www.advanceweb.com/LTC



Answers On Demand
Integrated Healthcare Solutions

The Power of One.
One unified software for your facility.



Integrated Point Of Care

How can one single information system help your facility?

AnswersElite® is the long term care industry's truly integrated Clinical, Financial and full Operations software solution. With over 45 modules covering your facility's needs, it is comprehensive in features and offers best of breed performance. Information entered in one area is instantly available in all areas of the system, eliminating the need for troublesome interfaces and allowing AnswersElite to help your facility:

- Improve Resident Outcomes
- Increase Revenues & Decrease Staff Turnover
- Reduce Expenses & Costly Errors

Discover the efficiency and power of one unified system for your community!
Call us at 800.311.8252 or email us at info@AODsoftware.com

Learn more about the Power of One at: www.AODsoftware.com/PowerOf1

© 2009 Answers On Demand. All rights reserved.

BE SURE TO VISIT OUR BOOTHS AT
AHCA #555 & AAHSA #644