



BUSY HOSPICE PROVIDER OVERCOMES STAFFING CRISIS,
—— Improves Patient & Caregiver Experience ——



Hospice Faces Sudden Staffing Crisis

Client Profile

Name of Organization: ThedaCare at Home

Location: Appleton, Wisconsin

Featured Administrator: Bobbie Thompson,
Manager of Clinical Office Operations

Number of Staff:

Census Number:

Services Provided: Hospice & Home Health

AHT Client Science: March 2014

ThedaCare at Home, a hospice and home-health provider located in Appleton, Wisconsin, was facing unprecedented staffing concern. *“There were four people positioned for retirement,”* Bobbie Thompson, Manager of Clinical Office Operations at ThedaCare at Home recalls, *“And we weren’t in a state to replace them.”*

With another nurse on FMLA leave, the pending departures of some of their most senior nurses left the already resource-thin hospice team feeling uncertain about the future. With over 75 to 100 calls a day, one on-call nurse wasn’t going to be sufficient. *“We were under minimum staffing,”* Thompson explains, *“It was a stressful time for nursing staff and leaders.”*

Thompson said they considered several options to bridge the gap. She asked the ThedaCare at Home Human Resources department to help with the hiring effort. They combed the database of over 6700 current nurses, but they weren’t able to find the needed replacements quickly. Thompson and other administrators considered cross-training for the current team, but that didn’t seem to be the ideal situation either. *“We weren’t sure what we were going to do,”* Thompson remembers.

GROWING PATIENT & CAREGIVER EXPERIENCE CONCERNS

Staffing concerns only compounded the already existing challenges with patient and caregiver experience during evening and weekend hours. ThedaCare at Home nurses relied on the support of a non-clinical answering service to help answer caregiver calls, but there had been growing concern over long wait times of up to twenty minutes.

The on-call nurses were struggling to keep up with the volume of calls. And it was going to be more challenging without their veteran nurses. Thompson knew that any solution they found for the staffing crisis also had to address the challenges they were experiencing with their answering service—no easy task. Thompson remembers the overwhelming challenge: *“Things started to become more urgent. We were in a perfect storm.”*

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Something had to be done—and fast.

AN UNEXPECTED SOLUTION

Something had to be done—and fast. Thompson hadn’t found the ideal solution to her staffing and patient experience challenges when she received a call from AfterHours Nursing Triage specialist Michelle Olsen.

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“If you are going to try something in the toughest of scenarios—it has to work.”

AfterHours Nursing Triage was able to respond to the specific needs of ThedaCare at Home quickly. *“If you are going to try something in the toughest of scenarios—it has to work,”* explains Thompson.

REINFORCEMENTS ARRIVE

Only days after signing up for service, ThedaCare at Home begin sending their calls to AfterHours Nursing Triage. Thompson remembers the quick turnaround time, *“They received the information one day to start helping us the next.”*

Thompson says it was like sigh of relief when ThedaCare at Home went “live” with AfterHours Nursing Triage: *“There was an element of relief,”* she says, *“it was like special forces were coming to help.”* The ThedaCare at Home nurses now knew they backup when they needed it most.

Thompson and her staff soon discovered that AfterHours Nursing Triage was more than a service provider—they were a true partner in care. *“They went above and beyond in effort, they took everything to heart, and were willing to teach and learn,”* Thompson explains.

Together, the AHT team and ThedaCare at Home team addressed every challenge the hospice provider had been facing. With the additional support from Afterhours Nursing Triage, the busy hospice provider had the time they so desperately needed to begin rebuilding their team without jeopardizing patient and caregiver experience.

SUPERIOR PATIENT CARE

Thompson explains that although the relationship with staff was an important part, the quality of the patient and caregiver support was most critical. She tells of her confidence in the caregiver and patient experience with AfterHours Nursing Triage, *“My patients wouldn’t have gotten this kind of customer service with anyone else.”*

“Michelle listened to my concerns,” Thompson remembers, *“And was able to present creative solutions.”* A few months later, when the situation had become urgent, Thompson remembered her call with Olsen, and she knew AfterHours Nursing Triage was the answer.

AfterHours Nursing Triage offered the additional layer of clinical support ThedaCare needed. Calls would be answered by registered nurses with hospice training—unlike the operators at their current answering service. The AfterHours nurses offered the higher level clinical thinking to receive, assess, and triage the calls appropriately, which Thompson and the others at ThedaCare saw as invaluable.

Additionally, Thompson appreciated that AfterHours Nursing Triage offered scalable services based on demand. Because the partnership was intended to be short-term until ThedaCare at Home overcame their staffing crisis, she needed a partner who could begin providing the value immediately without long-term requirements.

The AfterHours Nursing Team was able to work with the ThedaCare at Home IT department to integrate the AHT call and documentation platform with the existing AllScripts™ platform. Thompson said they went above and beyond to get the systems in place, *“They amazed me. They were problem-solvers. They were idea-people.”*



“It was like special forces were coming to help.”

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The ThedaCare at Home team quickly saw the difference in skill the nursing triage provider had from traditional answering services. With clinical training, AfterHours Nurses were able to resolve non-emergent calls while properly triaging calls to the ThedaCare on-call nurse when appropriate. Patients and caregivers were able to talk to a registered nurse within minutes, without ever experiencing a disruption in care.

The call volume was nearly cut in half.

"We wouldn't have been able to handle the call volume without AHT" Thompson admits, "It could have resulted in delay or patient risk." In fact, they found the call volume was nearly cut in half with AfterHours Nursing Triage support, reducing the total call volume to ThedaCare at Home on-call nurses to less than 50 calls per day. This ensured the most emergent calls received the attention they needed.

Thompson believes the partnership with After Hours Nursing Triage increased the overall patient satisfaction score because patients had support within minutes. *"The transition of care from ThedaCare to AHT was as seamless as it can be," she adds.*

STATE-OF-THE-ART TECHNOLOGY

In the healthcare world where documentation is so important, the AfterHours software platform was another benefit. ThedaCare at Home staff members found it was easy to use and navigate. Even nurses with limited technological experience were able to use the system on the first day of logging on. The Patient Documentation Portal (PDP) allowed Thompson and her team to access call information easily and quickly, allowing for a seamless transition of care.

The Daily Call Log gave Thompson the oversight for which she had hoped. Reports were printed every morning to provide a concise "snapshot" of everything that had happened during the night. And she knew she could listen to the calls whenever she wanted.

The advanced call recording technology also gave Thompson and her team peace of mind. Because all AfterHours Nursing Triage calls are recorded, there was never a question as to how a certain patient/caregiver call was handled. Thompson explains how the call reporting feature was used: *"If we had questions about a patient call, I would request the recording. I would have the recording within a matter of minutes, and an AHT nursing manager and I would listen to the call together to problem solve."*

BONUS BENEFITS

Partnering with AfterHours Nursing Triage had another positive effect that Thompson didn't anticipate. She says that the partnership has provided a "jumpstart" in the efforts to document and streamline ThedaCare at Home internal policies and processes.

Having relied on veteran nurses for years, ThedaCare at Home hadn't had an eminent need for clearly written guidelines. But writing policies to facilitate the partnership with AfterHours Nursing Triage helped them better define organizational standards. *"It allowed us to self-reflect on how to improve processes and communication," she says, "which has greatly helped us in the training efforts."*

CRISIS AVERTED

With AfterHours Nursing Triage support, ThedaCare at Home was able to overcome their staffing crisis. The partnership gave them the critical time they needed to hire and train new nurses, while simultaneously addressing how to improve patient and caregiver satisfaction and their own processes.

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Thompsons says she wouldn't hesitate to recommend AfterHours Nursing Triage to other hospice and home-health companies. *"In our experience, AfterHours was a team saver,"* she explains, *"AHT delivered on everything they said they would do."*

After six months with AfterHours Nursing Triage, ThedaCare at Home was positioned to handle all their incoming calls again. But Thompson says she will never forget how appreciative she was for AfterHours Nursing Triage: *"The partnership with AHT had multiple benefits for us: they cared for our patients, gave our team the hope to get through a difficult time, gave us space to improve our processes – you can't put a monetary amount on that."*

[Read Bobbie Thompson's full letter of recommendation here.](#)

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