

# How Many Distinct Databases Does One Agency Need?

It might be considered cumbersome to operate a home care agency and hospice with patient and business information stored in four separate databases but Robert Love considers it a tremendous accomplishment. The Marketing Manager and unofficial technology champion for Butte Home Health & Hospice in Chico, California, with assistance from InfoSys Healthcare Software Solutions, spent the last year getting the number down to four from fourteen.

Butte is a not-for-profit, independently-owned home care agency and hospice that has been serving four Northern California counties for 22 years. It is currently the largest home care provider in the area, with a typical monthly census of 300 home care and about 50 hospice patients.

## From paper to computers in one busy year

Until March, 2005, when Butte implemented *HomeSys*, the agency was almost completely paper-dependent. Getting vital business information was difficult if not impossible. 14 databases tracked every activity segment separately and each department – intake, billing, hospice, clinical, etc. – had its own copy of Filemaker or Microsoft Access. Referral sources tracking information kept by the intake department, for example, bore no resemblance to the same information coming from the billing department.

Everyone at Butte knew that a serious modernization plan was critically important but no one was in a position to initiate the effort. Finally, Love took time from his marketing duties to spearhead an investigation of available home care software products. “I got to know all the software vendors I could find,” he relates. “All of the big ones, and quite a few of the lesser-knowns.”

Based on his full-year study, Love recommended *HomeSys*, the home care and hospice management system from InfoSys. Further, he suggested that the agency engage the Schaumburg, Illinois vendor to reorganize its business processes for an automated environment, especially to help consolidate the 14 separate databases. At first, the way out from under Butte’s mountain of paper was difficult to visualize but ownership and management got behind the effort.

## Changes still in progress but already dramatic

Presently, only supply, hospice volunteer, and hospice bereavement databases remain to be incorporated into *HomeSys*, and Love sees that consolidation happening in a matter of months. “Over the past year,” Love says, “we’ve grown to adapt to the software, and the software has been

continually modified to meet our needs. Because of this new back office system, for example, our six home care and two hospice case managers can stay in the office,” Love begins to describe Butte’s process changes. “They are more accessible to our 45 clinicians in the field, to physicians and to our billing department but they are still in touch with what is going on with patients.”

Changes among the non-clinical staff have been equally significant. “We have eliminated duplication,” Love explains. “We are no longer entering the same data four times and management has access to up-to-the-minute, accurate patient information. The best example may sound trite but if you have a physician’s name spelled three different ways in your records and that physician receives three copies of the same mailing, it’s just embarrassing.” He is as enthusiastic about *HomeSys*’ ability to set up security groups to streamline the administrative process of limiting access to patient records.

Since Butte’s March, 2005 *HomeSys* implementation, staff adaptation has been predictably gradual but Love notes some surprises. “Our most paper-based department, hospice, was the quickest to embrace and adopt the new technology,” he recalls. “Apparently, they were really ready for new solutions. During the first month of implementation, while others were still learning how to write physicians orders, for example, hospice nurse managers were already faxing them from their desktops. When our hospice census surged last spring, the nurse managers credited Infosys with enabling them to manage the added case load.”

## Staff stepped up to need for change

As with any software implementation, Butte experienced its share of rough spots, Love was quick to add. “Some adapted immediately, some were mildly skeptical, and we had our ‘technology-averse’ users,” he explains. “One of our intake coordinators confided to me that she tossed and turned until 3 AM the night before her first day of training, worrying that she would never learn to use the system. Recently, she told me that she does not know how she had ever lived without it!”

Love’s list of automation’s advantages is lengthy and growing, as InfoSys consultants continue to find new ways to streamline operations. Early reports of enhanced accuracy resulting from the recently implemented InfoSys *OASIS Analyzer* are encouraging. The vendor’s *Digital Dashboard* is to be implemented next, followed by a physician portal and new assessment and clinical pathways modules. Love expects results from the next round of product implementations will be equally impressive.