

Family Caregivers Receive Support at Point of Care

University of Miami Center on Aging uses Cisco Unified IP Phones with video screens to provide counseling, education, and resources.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
<p>CENTER ON AGING AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Healthcare research • Miami, Florida • 54 participants in pilot; 1000+ participants expected in later phases
<p>BUSINESS CHALLENGE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help family members serve as an extension of the medical system
<p>NETWORK SOLUTION</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provided video-based counseling and skills training, support groups, and educational seminars on Cisco Unified IP Phone 7985G • Created text-based tips and resource lists displayed on IP phone screen
<p>BUSINESS RESULTS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enabled caregivers to access formal and informal support and resources without leaving family member • Provided cost-effective training and information • Helped reduce self-reports of isolation, loneliness, burden, and distress

Business Challenge

The worldwide population is aging, creating new challenges for the healthcare community. By combining advanced research, education, and community outreach, the University of Miami’s Center on Aging is finding ways to prevent disability, increase independence, and help older people lead active and rewarding lives. Faculty conduct research on aging, cognition, and diseases such as Alzheimer’s and also offer programs for the elderly and their family members.

Currently, the Center on Aging is developing innovative programs to help family members care for relatives who are frail or have chronic illness such as Alzheimer’s disease. “There is an increasing trend to keep patients in their homes instead of long-term care facilities,” says Sara Czaja, Ph.D., co-director of the Center on Aging. The primary caregiver is typically a family member, who becomes an

extension of the medical system, using the home as the workspace.

Today, family members usually do not receive training to care for people with illnesses such as Alzheimer’s disease and can become overwhelmed by behavioral problems and memory loss as well as basic caregiving activities such as bathing and feeding. “While family caregivers experience rewards, they also experience negative consequences, including stress, depression, loneliness, and their own health problems resulting from lack of self care,” says Dr. Czaja.

Part of the problem is that many caregivers cannot leave home to obtain resources or attend support groups. Therefore, a need has emerged to provide training to everyone, everywhere — including their own or a relative’s home. In response, the Center on Aging and other organizations developed a program called Resources for Enhancing Alzheimer’s Caregiver Health (REACH), funded by the National Institute on Aging and National Institute of Nursing Research which are part of the National Institutes of Health. In the first phase of the project at the University of Miami site, family caregivers were given phones with built-in screens that could display text-based instructions on topics that the caregivers selected from menus. Caregivers also participated in telephone support groups with other caregivers. The initial project was successful, and the Center on Aging decided to expand the intervention by adding video. “We hypothesized that caregivers would feel less isolated and lonely if they could see as well as hear other people in their support group,” says Dr. Czaja. The goal of the new pilot project, currently under way, is to measure the effectiveness of

video-based intervention in terms of caregiver outcomes: enhanced social support, reduced depression, better caregiving skills, and reduced burden. The Jacob and Valeria Langeloth Foundation is providing primary support for the project.

Network Solution

The Center on Aging selected the Cisco® Unified IP Phone 7985G for the program because of its large display area, buttons that caregivers could press to select different options, and the ease of programming to display text-based information based on caregivers' menu selections. "Telephones are a more familiar technology to this population than computers," says Dr. Czaja. Caregivers' homes are equipped with the Cisco Unified IP Phone, a broadband connection, and a Cisco 871 Router. The phone connects to the Cisco Unified Communications Manager on the Center on Aging network rather than the local phone company network. This connection provides the quality of service needed to send high-quality video over the Internet. Caregivers can make and receive calls exactly as they would with any other phone.

The pilot, which focuses on supporting minority caregivers, includes nine groups of six caregivers who are African-American, Hispanic, or Haitian. Menus and resources that appear on the IP phones are in the appropriate language (English, Spanish, and Creole), as are the counseling sessions. Caregivers use the Cisco Unified IP Phones to convert the home into a workspace, used for the following activities:

- Individual counseling sessions: Each caregiver receives six one-hour, private video telephony sessions with a trained counselor from the Center on Aging. The sessions cover topics such as stress management, dealing with behavioral problems, legal and financial issues, and how to manage depression. "Conducting counseling sessions over the network avoids travel for both the counselor and the caregiver," says Dr. Czaja. "Early indications suggest that videoconferencing is more effective and satisfying for caregivers than voice-only conferencing. And seeing the caregiver's face gives counselors valuable insights into how the caregiver is coping."
- Online support groups: Groups of up to six caregivers participate in five one-hour support groups with a trained facilitator. The faces of all participants appear on the screen, and the speaker is highlighted. "Our research shows that caregivers really appreciate the support sessions," Dr. Czaja says. The Cisco Unified Communications solution hosted at the Center on Aging calls the caregivers automatically at the scheduled time, so they simply answer the phone to join the group.

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— Sara Czaja, Ph.D, Co-director , Center on Aging, University of Miami

- Educational seminars: Caregivers will soon be able to watch videos of University of Miami faculty members discussing treatment advances for Alzheimer's and tips for caregivers to maintain their own health.

- Finding resources: Caregivers can find local and national resources by pressing buttons on their Cisco Unified IP Phone. Caregivers who are interested in finding respite care for a family member, for example, can view a list of questions to ask when interviewing respite-care providers.
- Reviewing information and tips: Caregivers press a button to select from a list of tip topics, including wandering, agitation, living wills, and stress-management techniques.
- Obtaining quick solutions at the point of care: The Center on Aging compiled easy-to-understand tips for the most common challenges for caregivers of Alzheimer's patients, such as behavioral agitation. Tips are presented in easy-to-read bullet format, such as "Remain calm" and "Don't confront the patient."
- Viewing reminders: The Cisco Unified IP Phone display shows reminders created by the caregiver or counselors, such as reminders of a counseling session.
- Placing calls: Caregivers can view a list of their frequently called phone numbers, such as friends, family, and counselors, and dial by simply selecting the name.

Business Results

The Center on Aging will compare the results of the intervention after the six-month pilot, and again three months after the pilot is complete. Factors to be measured include the caregivers' skills and ability to take care of themselves, as well as decrease in caregiver burden and depression. "Our expectation is that caregivers will leave the pilot with greater knowledge of community resources and enhanced social support, both formal and informal, and will engage in more self-care activities," says Dr. Czaja.

Giving family members the resources and support that they need has a significant economic impact. Currently, there are 22 million family caregivers in the United States alone, a population expected to increase to 37 million by 2050, according to Dr. Czaja. The estimated economic value of family-provided care is US\$257 billion annually. "When family members take on the role of caregivers, society saves billions of dollars," she says. "Using network technology to deliver resources and support to the point of care can prove to be beneficial for caregivers, the healthcare community, and the economy."

Next Steps

The Center on Aging plans to add more video-based instruction, on topics such as helping people with basic everyday activities such as dressing, bathing, and mobility, and is evaluating the feasibility of using video telephony for patient assessment.

PRODUCT LIST
<p>Routing and Switching</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cisco Catalyst Switches 6500 and 3700 • Cisco 7600 Routers • Cisco 3845 Gateways • Cisco 871 Routers (in caregivers' homes) <p>Unified Communications</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cisco Unified Communications Manager • Cisco Unified IP Phone 7985G

Researchers also plan to study the effectiveness of providing Cisco Unified IP Phones to other family members who live out of the area, so that they can see their relative and provide support to the caregiver. "If successful, this intervention program could be implemented in communities throughout the United States to help family members act as extensions of the medical system," says Dr. Czaja.

For More Information:

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