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Award-Winning Scientist Uses Innovative Canadian Telephony Technology to Improve Healthcare

Dr. Alan Forster Conducts Clinical Trials with Vocantas CallAssure™

OTTAWA, ON, CANADA - July 18, 2007 - As one strategy to improve patient care, Dr. Alan Forster of the Ottawa Health Research Institute has been researching post-discharged patients, as these patients represent a high-risk group with respect to complications developing after leaving hospital. As telephone follow-up is one method of monitoring patients, Dr. Forster wanted to find out if an Interactive Voice Response System (IVRS) could improve the effectiveness of patient follow-up.

Knowing of their expertise in innovative telephony solutions, he asked Vocantas to develop a system that would increase the efficiency of contacting patients by telephone so that adverse events could be identified early and reduced or eliminated. Vocantas responded with the development of CallAssure™, a US patent-pending IVRS designed to improve post-discharged patient care.

Dr. Forster ran a number of clinical trials using CallAssure to examine its usefulness in monitoring post-discharged patients at The Ottawa Hospital. In the most recent trial, which was published by the Journal of Evaluation in Clinical Practice, the call dialogue was carefully designed to administer a simple survey via the automated system 48 hours after discharge. The survey's objective was to triage and identify all patients with new health problems-without adding work to the highly skilled healthcare staff. These patients were quickly assessed by CallAssure and then telephoned by a nurse to clarify and address the problem. CallAssure provided additional value as detailed statistics from patient responses were automatically and securely integrated with the hospital database enabling Dr. Forster and his team to easily access a number of reports for analysis and audit trail.

This trial highlighted two important findings. First, the efficiency of using CallAssure suggests it can be used to improve quality of care without a significant impact on workflow. The system made 357 calls to reach patients while clinical nurses needed to contact only 20 patients who actually required attention. This fact is particularly important given a healthcare system which is afflicted with chronic human resource shortages. Second, although there are only a small proportion of patients who require a call, many of these can benefit from telephone contact with a trained health professional. Of the small number of patients that did require nurse intervention, 50% had issues that could have become serious had there been no follow-up. This finding suggests that with relatively small investments for this technology, hospitals could have a significant impact in improving patient outcomes.

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Dr. Forster is also evaluating the use of CallAssure in other contexts. One study involves providing appointment reminders and medication dosage updates to patients with chronic blood clotting conditions. Patients involved in the study, including Ms. Dianna Siteman of Navan, Ontario, have reacted positively. "I think it is a great system that could benefit a lot of people," she said. "It really helps to be reminded of my appointments and I get my follow-up results much faster than I used to."

Future studies, funded by the Canadian Patient Safety Institute, should help to further define the benefits of the technology. When this work was performed, Dr. Forster held the PSI Foundation Scholarship in Innovative Health Services Research. He now holds an Ontario Ministry of Health Career Scientist Award.

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About Vocantas

Vocantas is a developer of interactive voice response systems (IVRS) that use advanced computer telephony and speech technology to provide its customers with cost-effective customer outreach solutions. The company's easy-to-use, turn-key solutions offer customizable core features and optional enhancements that integrate seamlessly with existing systems. Its products have particular application in the healthcare, education, utilities and customer service environments where they have been proven to increase efficiencies while minimizing operational costs. For more information, please visit www.vocantas.com.

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