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MAIN STREET

Firm works to purge paperwork

By Ted Nesi
PBN Staff Writer

David Piccoli had been working as a receptionist at the treatment clinic Discovery House in South Providence for only six months in 1991 when he decided there must be a better way to manage the facility's endless flow of patient records, billing data and other paperwork.

"I just saw it to be very chaotic," Piccoli recalled recently. "Nobody had access to information quickly."

But Piccoli wasn't satisfied with any of the electronic-records products then on the market because they focused on just one piece of the business, such as third-party billing or clinic records. "No one ever really combined everything together," he said.

So Piccoli decided to create the program he wanted. He partnered with a computer programmer who was also an old family friend, Paul LeBeau, and they built a new clinic-management software application for Discovery House. It worked so well that they formed a company, Smart Management, to sell the program to other clinics.

Seventeen years later, Smart Management has grown into a \$4 million-a-year business. Its software, which is now in its third iteration, is used as far away as Hawaii, London, and – in translation – Greece. The company works with behavioral health facilities that offer mental health, residential, adolescent, and substance abuse treatments.



PHOTO COURTESY SMART
MANAGEMENT

OUTSMARTING THE REST:
David Piccoli was a receptionist at Discovery House when he set out to develop electronic medical records products to improve efficiency.

The company reached a milestone in June when it announced the signing of its 100th client, the substance abuse division at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine of Yeshiva University in the Bronx. The medical school is also Smart Management's largest client so far, with roughly 3,200 patients a year in its chemical-dependency treatment centers.

The idea behind Smart Management's Clinic Management Software is to digitize and automate a facility's paperwork, from patient dosing and drug testing to scheduling and third-party billing.

"We're what you'd call a one-stop shop," said Piccoli. "It's everything. From the moment a patient calls the facility, we track all the information."

Once a clinic decides to purchase the Smart Management software, company representatives visit the facility to ascertain its requirements. The program is written so that its settings can be tweaked to match various kinds of operations. Smart Management also manages 20 clinics, including the Discovery House group, on behalf of the owners.

The company is also at the forefront of an industry that looks set to grow in the next decade. As the nation continues to deal with the rising cost of health care, electronic medical records are often cited as a way of bringing down expenses while reducing errors and improving care.

But the medical community has been slow to adopt the new technology, partly because of cost. Not surprisingly, Piccoli is a firm believer in the benefits of tracking patient information electronically. "I don't understand how anybody can operate without it," he said.

Part of what makes the system effective, Piccoli said, is that it makes clinic counselors the ones who input information about their patients, and those with authorization can also easily access a patient's complete history at the facility.

"One of my big pushes when we developed this, early on, was not to make it a data-entry product – to truly make it a product people would use," he said.

The sensitivity of the information also makes safeguarding privacy a key concern for the company's programmers. After they log into the system, clinic employees are shown a different window based on their access privileges – so a receptionist sees only the scheduling calendar, while a doctor or a counselor can access full patient records.

Another benefit of switching to an electronic record-keeping system is that it allows clinics to quickly and easily crunch numbers to analyze clinical, financial and other internal statistics. Years ago, Piccoli said, "I remember us trying to collect data. ... Maybe a week later we'd get the numbers we want. Now, I get it in seconds."

Piccoli said he is also proud of Smart Management's community outreach. "As a company, we're civic-minded," he said. "We're not an overly rich company, but we try to do what we can."

On the day he was interviewed, in fact, Piccoli was preparing for a company-wide picnic taking

place that afternoon that was raising donations for the Rhode Island Food Bank. The company also funds the Ishi Dojo Youth Fitness Center in Providence, which provides martial arts, nutrition, dance and theatre classes to 75 underprivileged young people. •

COMPANY PROFILE

Smart Management

OWNERS: David Piccoli II

TYPE OF BUSINESS: Medical technology

LOCATION: 66 Pavilion Ave., Providence

EMPLOYEES: 45

YEAR ESTABLISHED: 1991

ANNUAL SALES: \$4 million