



Monongahela Valley Hospital

Improving transition of care with **ABILITY | ILLUMINATE™**

Monongahela Valley Hospital (MVH) is a community fixture in southwestern Pennsylvania. It's a 210-bed, full-service healthcare facility with a 225-member medical staff representing more than 40 medical specialties. MVH is also the largest employer in the mid-Monongahela Valley and serves patients from several counties. The MVH healthcare system, in one form or another, has been around for over 110 years and its status in its region supports that solid history.

Of course, history doesn't mean much if you aren't keeping up with the needs of your community. MVH demonstrates that commitment in many ways, including a recent project with ABILITY Network to develop an automated transition of care service.

Christine Baloh, LSW, is Director of Social Service at MVH, where she has worked for 19 years. At MVH, Baloh is responsible for the social services department, including a staff of 8 Social Workers and a Registered Nurse, and oversees the integration of social work practice and discharge planning into the provision of acute care and program development. Baloh is also responsible for the Community Care Transitions Program for which she was awarded a CMS grant in partnership with the local Area Agency on Aging.

According to Baloh, she's been a social work professional "since I was born," and is passionate about helping families understand and maneuver through the maze of the healthcare system.

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Christine Baloh, LSW
Director of Social Services,
Monongahela Valley Hospital (MVH)

The challenge: more referrals but no more staff

Baloh became involved in the ABILITY project when she answered a survey about automating the transition of care process. "It's a need we had identified, and the timing couldn't have been better," Baloh recalled. "When ABILITY asked if I could participate in the development of this new service, I was ready."

Baloh had a good idea of what she needed at MVH. "We've known for quite some time that we need an automated system. Our referrals keep growing, and so does our work – but we can't keep adding staff.

"I could probably use 3-4 more social workers, to be honest," Baloh continued. Each of her 9 staff has a substantial case load. "I had to come up with some way for us to work more efficiently and smarter. We can't just add more people or more budget."

The chance to develop an electronic transition of care system – and then to be one of the first to use it – was an easy decision for Baloh. "It was an opportunity for us to start using a more advanced, more automated system that would help us and our patients. And I knew that making our work more efficient also would help us retain good staff."

“Ground zero”: developing a service tailored to needs

It was exciting to be in on the very beginnings of the new service. "I was in at 'ground zero,' which was great. They were really picking my brain: what would I want in a system, what would I want it to do?" Baloh said. "And I would tell them, here's what I'm looking for, and they would say okay, we're listening to you, we'll put that into the service."

Given her years of experience, Baloh was confident that what she requested would be put to good use by other organizations. For example, she requested the ability to transfer the patient's medical record to the nursing home as an attachment to the secure electronic message. She also asked for the option to send out blanket referrals to all their post-acute providers or to be able to pick and choose, depending on the patient needs. "ABILITY was hearing the same things from other providers, so they made the refinements we were needing."

The launch of ABILITY | ILLUMINATE at MVH

The resulting automated transition of care service, called ABILITY | ILLUMINATE, was primed to make faster, easier, more informed connections among patients, acute and post-acute providers through electronic communications.

Baloh selected two key MVH staff to be among the first to use ABILITY | ILLUMINATE because of their experience with other computer systems and because of their heavy placement load. During the first weeks of implementation, Baloh and her staff members had weekly phone calls with the ABILITY | ILLUMINATE team. “They would ask us to try out this function or that one, and then ask us: how did that work? When we made a suggestion, ABILITY always listened to what we said, in order to help improve the service.”

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One of the major benefits of ABILITY | ILLUMINATE is the electronic network it creates between a hospital and their referral (post-acute) organizations. “One concern I had when we started was that we only have two fairly small nursing homes really near our hospital,” Baloh noted. “If you go out 25 miles, that’s where most of them are located.”

But many times a patient will need care services that not every facility can provide. To build up the network of possibilities, the ABILITY team “really went above and beyond to market ILLUMINATE to the nursing homes in the area. They signed up about 25 skilled nursing facilities to join with us,” Baloh reported. “The benefits really resonated with the facilities: it will help streamline the process on their end, too, and save them time.”

Results: faster, smoother placements

How have things changed, since ABILITY | ILLUMINATE was implemented at MVH?

“The time it takes to make a placement!” Baloh said without hesitation. “Before ILLUMINATE, we were calling every nursing home, explaining the patient to all of them, asking about beds.” Now, using the ABILITY | ILLUMINATE electronic communications system, “we can expedite the same process and free up time for the social worker to spend time with the families.”

The big advantage has come from streamlining the process by moving to secure electronic messaging. “It really reduces the time on the phone. And all the faxing! Sometimes faxes wouldn’t got through, then you had to get on the phone and re-do them,” explained Baloh. “During the development process with ABILITY, we cut out even more of the back-and-forth steps. Now we’re down to one phone call or one message. Before it was 5 and 6 phone calls per patient.

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Baloh pointed out that MVH has similar challenges to other hospitals. “We need to transition patients to other levels of care quickly, in order to keep our length of stay down. But, at the same time,” she added, “we need to minimize re-admissions by making sure the patient is going to the most appropriate provider.” Getting back time that used to be spent faxing and playing phone tag helps with both those goals.

Helping patients with complex needs

Baloh also related a story about how ABILITY | ILLUMINATE helped with a particularly challenging referral. A young woman, a single mom of four, had terminal cancer and was on state assistance. She wanted to continue radiation and chemotherapy, which meant trips from the nursing home to MVH. But finding affordable transportation was a struggle.

“So in one of our team meetings, my two ABILITY | ILLUMINATE staff said, ‘Let’s get on ILLUMINATE and see what we can find.’ Within 24 hours, they found four facilities who were willing to transport this patient back and forth to our hospital for her treatments,” Baloh said. “In working with one of the facilities, we were able to find financial help that would pay for the transportation.”

Continuing the partnership

Baloh is looking forward to continuing the partnership with ABILITY. “I really like the vision of what they want to be able to do with ABILITY | ILLUMINATE,” she said. “They’re interested in growing and continuing to improve the service. I know our hospital places a big emphasis on process improvement, and I see the same thing with ABILITY – they want to correct it, refine it, and make it better.

“The customer support is great – they really listen to us. When I first started this project, I researched ABILITY and liked what I saw. I thought, ‘that’s a good company to work with.’”

The relationship has proven to be a “win-win” for both MVH and ABILITY. The ultimate winners are the patients served by MVH who will experience an improved transition of care.

See what **ABILITY | ILLUMINATE™** can do for your organization. Request a customized demo today by calling **888.988.5605** or simply click the button below.

About ABILITY®

ABILITY® Network is a leading healthcare technology company trusted by thousands of payers and providers across the continuum of care. Through the use of the ABILITY Network comprehensive suite of care coordination and workflow services, our customers are able to improve efficiency, reduce costs, increase cash flow and more effectively manage the financial and clinical complexities of healthcare.



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