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Beyond Siri: Netsmart introduces voice in health IT

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Entering medical information into a computer can be a tedious task that takes extra time for clinicians and diverts attention away from the patient. **Netsmart Technologies Inc.** is working to combat the time-consuming task by introducing voice recognition and command into health care IT.

The Overland Park-based company has teamed up with M*Modal Inc. to integrate its FluencyDirect services, a cloud-based speech recognition solution, into its behavioral health electronic health records.

When a clinician or psychologist meets with a client, they typically record vitals and go through a patient interview that's all recorded and input into the electronic health record. This may include information about the patient's condition, medication and therapy treatment, progress, educational lessons the health care professional provided and other notes relevant to the patient's visit, said Dru Anne Walz, senior

director for product management at Netsmart.

With the new technology, instead of voice recording and transcribing the visit – which used to be the norm – the health care professional can speak directly into the system to navigate through the EHR and input the information, said David Gordon, the general manager for Plexus technologies and corporate development at Netsmart.

Gordon said this reduces the time spent documenting, which is a big issue among health care providers. Voice command also focuses the clinician's attention on the patient and helps with quicker reimbursement, since the documentation – which is required – can be approved quicker.

A unique feature of M*Modal's program is that it works specifically with health care, so it understands complex health care terminology that another system might not pick up or understand – think Siri used in Apple phones and other systems used in cars.

M*Modal also features around 250,000 different voice profiles, Gordon said.

The system can recognize regional dialects and accents to make sure it knows who is giving the command.

James Roberson, vice president of program services at KVC Hospitals Inc., said the voice recognition feature is an important factor in the program, especially for KVC. The behavioral health national nonprofit child welfare and behavioral health care organization is an early adopter of the program.

“A lot of electronic medical records are not designed for behavioral health care and our staff is just now getting comfortable using the software,” Roberson said. “This system makes it so much easier. The psychiatrist can dictate directly into the EHR and it can be approved and submitted right away.”

Olathe-based KVC started the planning process with M*Modal a few months ago and is now starting the integration and testing phase. Netsmart started collaborating with M*Modal about a year ago and Gordon said it hopes to have the majority of its clients utilizing the system within three years.