



SOUTHWEST MEDICAL'S WINNING STRATEGY:

Driving efficiency and attracting new patients through telemedicine

"We all know we can't just keep continuing doing business as we do now. Telemedicine is one of the solutions to long-term care in this country."

- Dr. Eugene Somphone, Medical Director of On Demand Medicine, Southwest Medical Associates

Opportunity

Southwest Medical Associates in Las Vegas, Nevada saw the promise of introducing telehealth to its patients. They wanted to find a partner to offer a direct-to-consumer offering to engage patients and provide them with a new way of getting convenient care. The organization has always strived to provide same day access to care and to resolve issues at the first call. Executive leadership at Southwest Medical was convinced that telemedicine was a clear fit to meet these goals.

Solution

Southwest Medical partnered with Amwell to launch telehealth to its patients, introducing SMA NowClinic. SMA launched an initial urgent care program to employees, followed by a full launch to its patients on January 1, 2014.

Success

Southwest Medical has seen vigorous participation since launching the program, with over 30,000 patient program enrollments and more than 20,000 patient visits over the course of the program. With visits climbing rapidly, the organization has added new providers since its initial launch and has introduced new behavioral health and rheumatology telemedicine services. Southwest Medical Associates also introduced telehealth for Medicaid patients in December 2015 and will launch to Medicare patients in 2017.

33K+
Enrollments

20K+
Visits

92%
of members gave the
NowClinic experience
4 or 5 stars

Background

Southwest Medical is a multi-specialty group founded in 1972 and based in Las Vegas, Nevada. It includes over 20 offices, two outpatient surgical centers and approximately 350 providers. Southwest Medical offers primary care, specialty care and urgent care, in addition to a variety of specialized, focused programs to help patients undergoing treatment or with chronic conditions. Additionally, Southwest Medical is a strong brand throughout the Southern Nevada area.

The organization is a wholly-owned subsidiary of UnitedHealth Group and Optum and includes a mix of different payers, including:

- UnitedHealthcare, which administers the state's largest HMO and is the largest payer, with shared risk for commercial members
- Medicare Advantage, full risk
- Medicaid
- Self-funded plans

At its core, Southwest Medical offers convenient, on-demand medicine to its patients. It provides same day access through a variety of treatment modes, emphasizes convenience and seeks to solve an issue at the first call. Its motto is "Right time. Right level. Right place."

Given this focus on on-demand medicine, telemedicine was an ideal fit to help the organization provide high quality convenient care to its patients. Southwest Medical decided to introduce a comprehensive telemedicine program, and support was coming from the highest levels. The CEO of UnitedHealthcare Nevada, Don Giancursio, encouraged the program, wanting to offer it as a fully embedded benefit for members.

Defining goals for telemedicine

Southwest Medical's positioning made it a clear fit with on-demand telemedicine. The organization set out to achieve four broad goals with its telemedicine initiatives. Its goals were to:

1. Improve the patient experience
2. Improve population health
3. Reduce per capita costs
4. Improve the provider experience

The health plan would fund telemedicine, giving access to its 320,000 plus members. For Southwest Medical, telemedicine was another way to deliver on its core values and provide access and good care to patients.

"We view it as another access point to medical care. It promises to be highly effective."

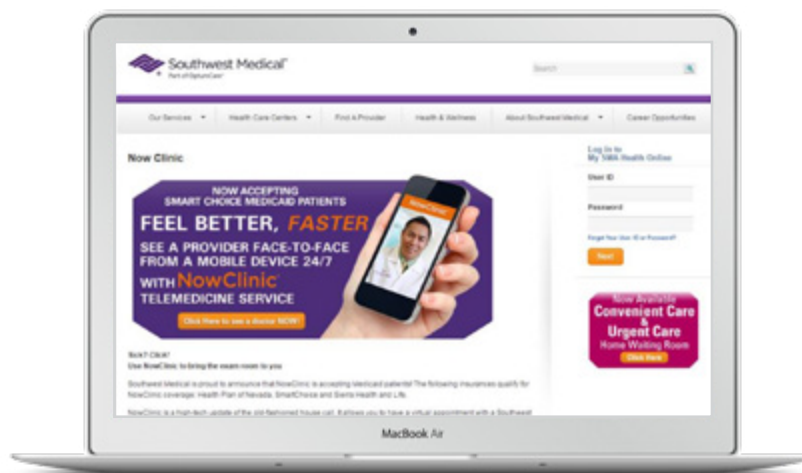
- Dr. Robert McBeath, President of Optum Care Nevada, the parent company of Southwest Medical Associates

Key stakeholders

The team wanted to get the program off the ground quickly and set to work determining the operational goals. Optum already had NowClinic, its telemedicine offering, in place since 2010 and the team wanted to take advantage of the existing infrastructure.

The team for the launch included senior support from the highest levels and a cross-functional mix of team members, including Dr. Robert McBeath, president of Optum Care Nevada; Toni Corbin, the Vice President of Operations for Southwest Medical; Dr. Eugene Somphone, the Medical Director of On Demand Medicine for Southwest Medical; Dr. Lo-Fu Tan, Associate Medical Director of On Demand Medicine for Southwest Medical; and Bobette Ready, Executive Director, Southwest Medical.

To ensure success, the broader team included all key areas: legal, contracts, finance, IT, human capital, marketing, recruiting, training, operations, quality, reporting, risk, management. Having a cross-functional team with senior support was key to developing an effective telemedicine strategy.



Implementing for success

Choosing a Partner

Southwest Medical had had an introduction to Amwell through Optum's telehealth partnership, but the core team did their homework to check out the possible platforms and technologies they could use. Choosing to partner with Amwell came down to four key factors:

1. A track record of success, working with health plans and providers
2. Strong leadership that was dedicated to finding opportunities and solving challenges
3. A shared sense of excellence and unwillingness to accept less than the best experience
4. Robust, reliable and scalable technology

As the team grew to know Amwell, they also found that the organization offered a very unique partnership. Amwell was committed to sharing best practices amongst customers whether through connecting two customers who were introducing similar programs or through meeting other partners at the annual Client Forum.

“Amwell’s approach makes the products and services better. When we all share our knowledge and solutions, we advance the industry.”

- Dr. Lo-Fu Tan, Associate Medical Director of On Demand Medicine, Southwest Medical Associates

Southwest Medical was putting its trusted brand on the telehealth offering and it was so important that the telehealth partner fit its values and be committed to success and innovation.

Pilot Plan

The organization planned an October 2013 pilot, partnering with Health Plan of Nevada, the state’s largest HMO, Optum NowClinic and Amwell.

The team set out to achieve some comprehensive goals with its NowClinic telehealth offering for the first year:

- 3% utilization, or 9,600 visits
- An average handle time of less than 15 minutes
- Average speed to answer of less than 10 minutes
- Customer satisfaction score of >90%

Southwest Medical also wanted to offer 24/7/365 access.

To achieve these goals, Dr. Somphone and Dr. Tan developed a pilot program to prepare providers for all possible scenarios. The team held weekly practice sessions and recruited mock patients. They would regularly have five people call in at the same time in order to fully test the system. Connection time was very important and this testing helped ensure they could meet their goals. They also ensured that there was always at least one provider available 24 hours a day.

Provider Engagement and Planning

The team considered staffing needs carefully and decided to enlist five full-time providers, which included two physicians and three extenders. Additionally, they included six per diem extenders and two medical assistants to greet patients and direct traffic. They also had other urgent care providers available for volume surges. It was critical to the team to provide a solid operational experience.

For the full launch, they decided to use Amwell Medical Group, a telemedicine group affiliated with Amwell and national network for doctors, as a wraparound service to ensure extended geographic availability and full coverage 24 hours a day. “We thought, why would we reinvent the wheel when Amwell Medical Group exists?” said Dr. Tan.

Provider qualifications were not something that Southwest Medical took lightly and they created a profile of the ideal provider to practice telemedicine. The team recruited providers that had:

- Excellent clinical acumen and judgment

- Technology savviness
- Enthusiasm about telemedicine
- Telegenic qualities

The team identified additional provider-specific goals, including keeping the antibiotic prescription rate for respiratory infections under 30% and following HEDIS measures.

Southwest Medical recruited a team of eight full-time providers and eight part-time providers. They interviewed all new providers online to get a sense of how they did on video. Willingness to talk and engage with the patients was the key factor for success.

The comprehensive training program consisted of a profile setup, system overview, self-study modules, a system demonstration, mock visits and coaching, workstation testing and activation. This plan allowed the team to ensure that all providers were set up and felt confident about delivering telemedicine to patients. Additional oversight measures were put in place as an extra step. Providers had 24/7 access to a support team and a physician supervisor and a review of all charts in the initial stages. Finally, the team watched providers via direct observation through proxy access to their desktops.

Providers were more skeptical at first, wondering whether a video visit would be less intimate and make it more difficult to truly connect with the patient. Once they became more comfortable, however, they found that a video visit offered a level of intimacy beyond an in-person visit. "I love that ability to sit there face-to-face with a patient for an uninterrupted length of time. It's much more intimate than an in-clinic visit." said Dr. Tan.

The initial launch of SMA NowClinic

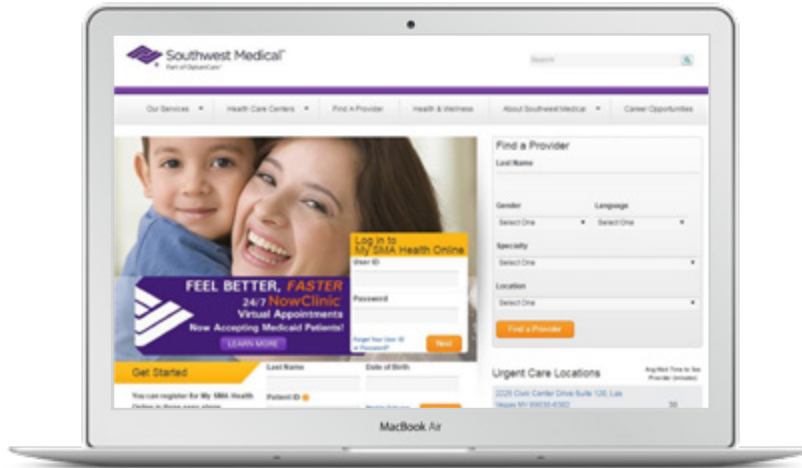
Launching Telehealth

The pilot began with a 3-month trial period to test the system and work out any issues. SMA launched to 3,000 Nevada UnitedHealth employees, who were all eligible for visits with no co-pays. This pilot period served to stress test the system and gather employee comments and feedback for enhancing the program.

The initial telehealth offering was launched with minimal advertisements as the team focused on service commitments, staffing and eliminating any technical issues. After 6 months of the pilot plus an additional soft launch, the team began an integrated marketing campaign, designed to drive visits to the system. The marketing plan consisted of online marketing tactics such as email announcements, web portal highlights and links, and Facebook. The plan also included tactics like health plan newsletters and signage such as posters, danglers, floor decals and brochures to drive awareness of the new service. Finally, in-clinic navigators directed patients to the new service, NowClinic.

The beginning focus was on getting patients to enroll and have a visit, a critical barrier to overcome. "Once you get patients to have the first visit, they really understand the convenience and quality of telemedicine and are much more likely to use it in the future," said Ron Rubin, Associate Director, Clinical Business Operations, Southwest Medical

Figure 1: SMA NowClinic's log-in screen



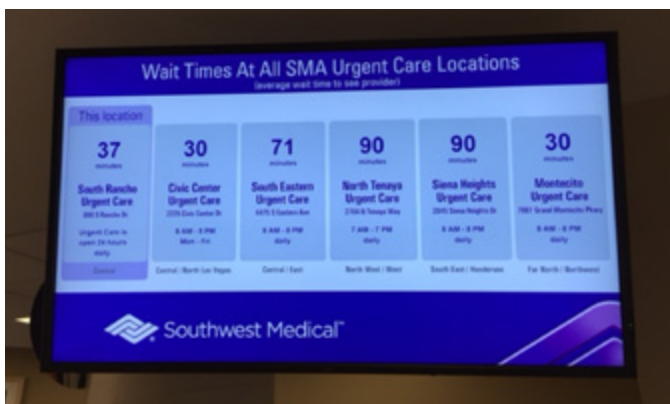
Marketing Plan

The team developed a multi-pronged marketing plan designed to target patients with many touchpoints. By building marketing to patients directly into Southwest Medical's operations, they created many ways to drive awareness of NowClinic, and ensured that nearly every patient would have knowledge of the offering.

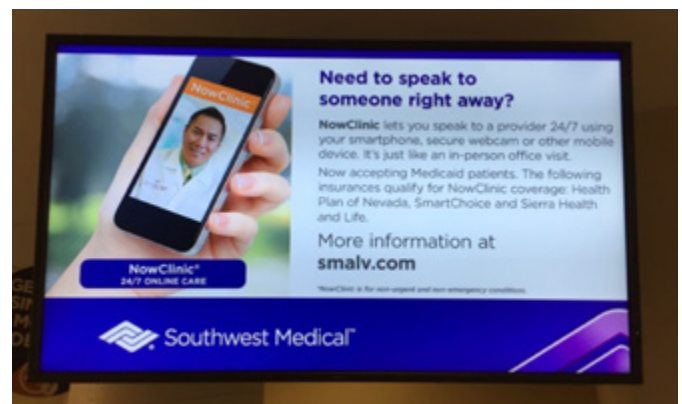
In-Clinic

When the patient enters the clinic, they see a rack card and a tri-fold brochure alerting them to NowClinic. While standing in line to check in, floor vinyl signage lets them know that "you could be at home right now" using NowClinic. The team also set up ceiling dangles with signage for NowClinic. A television panel shows wait times at the various convenient and urgent care clinics, and rotates to include NowClinic messaging to patients waiting to check in. Finally, staff ask members patients if they're familiar with NowClinic when they check in: "Are you familiar with these additional services/locations provided by SMA?" This adds a word-of-mouth element to the marketing and allows staff to really inform patients about what NowClinic is. Essentially, every person who comes to urgent care finds out about NowClinic.

Figure2: In-Clinic marketing ensured every patient knew about NowClinic



TV screen shows wait times at urgent care locations

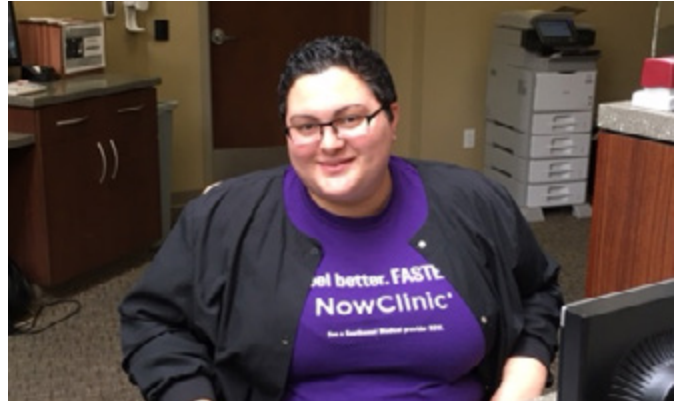


TV screen then shows that you can see a doctor via video, immediately.

Figure 3:



A rack card alerts patients in the waiting room that you could be home seeing a doctor



A staff member tells patients about SMA NowClinic at check-in.

Online Marketing

The marketing plan has consistently included online advertising, although the methods have changed and grown throughout the life of SMA's NowClinic. Online marketing has included Facebook advertising, online videos, emails and health plan newsletters.

In-app Messaging

SMA has a patient app called MySMA that includes urgent care wait times and options for seeing a provider, one of which is NowClinic. Patients can click directly into NowClinic from the patient app and be taken to NowClinic to see a doctor immediately.

Call Center

Southwest Medical operates a large call center to manage its facilities, and the staff on call will make referrals to NowClinic for patients who would benefit from this type of visit.

The key to success for Southwest Medical's marketing was building up a critical mass of awareness around NowClinic and working to get the patient right at the pain point, when they really need to see a doctor. The marketing is designed to remind people at every critical access point that you can use NowClinic to see a doctor.

Results: Surpassing goals, with 20,000+ visits

In the first year, Southwest Medical completed over 5,000 visits, with nearly 18,500 enrollments – 6% of the population enrolled in this initial launch stage. The team met the goal of answering in under 10 minutes, as the average speed to answer was 4 minutes and 23 seconds. The average handle time was 8 minutes and 10 seconds, again coming in well under the goal of 15 minutes. 73% of the consults have been female and 95% of the visits were conducted via video.

Figure 4: In-app messaging served as another reminder to use NowClinic

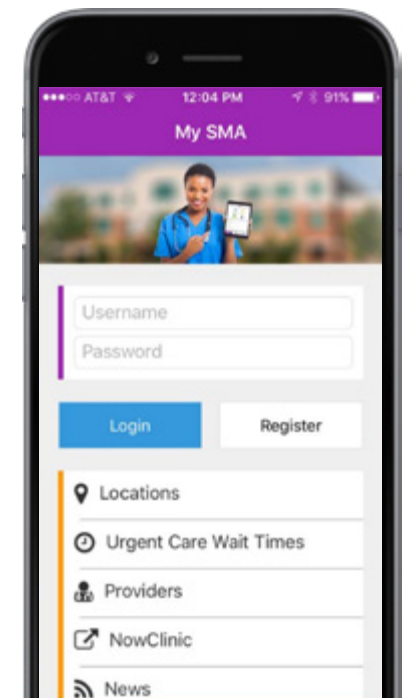


Figure 5: NowClinic achieved its handle time and visit time goals

GOAL = UNDER 10_{MIN} / ACTUAL = 4:23_{MIN}

Southwest Medical also surpassed customer satisfaction goals, with 92% of members giving the NowClinic experience 4 or 5 stars, and 94% of members giving the providers 4 or 5 stars. Net Promoter Score was also high, with 85% of members stating that they would recommend the service to friends or family. The Southwest Medical team credits some of its success to alignment with its goals.

Figure 6: Patient satisfaction was high



Figure 7: Visits increased greatly from year 1 to year 2

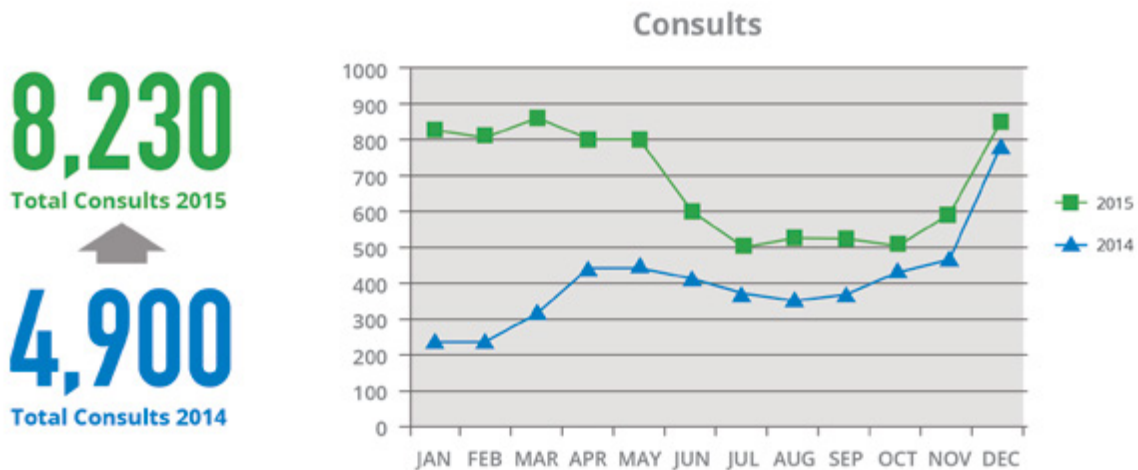
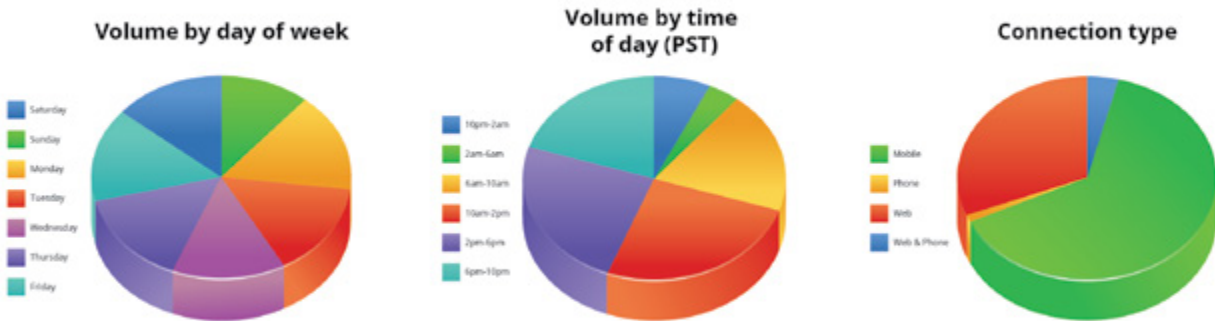


Figure 8: Visits by day, time and connection type



The Future: 2016 and beyond

“There’s a tremendous potential for growth. Like any new technology, it takes time. Amazon didn’t become a success overnight, and patients are getting used to this. As they get comfortable, it will be a major avenue for patient care and has huge potential not just in Nevada but across the country.”

– Dr. Eugene Somphone, Medical Director of On Demand Medicine, Southwest Medical Associates

As of mid-2016, Southwest Medical had completed over 33,000 enrollments, with over 20,000 visits. By this time the average speed to handle a visit was 4 minutes and 49 seconds and the average visit time was 8 minutes and 15 seconds.

Figure 9: Southwest Medical continues to achieve excellent results



Southwest Medical has plans to expand its urgent care offering to launch new services. In 2016, the team launched behavioral health and rheumatology in a pilot, and is currently training doctors for telehealth in these areas.

Southwest Medical also brought Medicaid patients on to the platform. With the introduction of the Affordable Care Act, Southwest Medical had added many new patients and determined carefully how to effectively reach these new patients. Thinking ahead to 2017, the organization is now considering how to reach Medicare patients. Medicare is a major part of the organization’s population. Southwest Medical is particularly excited about how multiway video, a new feature in Amwell’s AW9 technology, can play to caregivers or children who want to include their elderly parents in a visit.

Academically, the team also released a study in 2016 on the care and follow up for patients diagnosed with upper respiratory infections in brick-and-mortar urgent care centers compared to telehealth. The study was published in the Journal of e-Health and Telemedicine and found that 26% of patients needed follow-up visits over a two week period in brick-and-mortar. In a telehealth setting, only 4% of patients needed a follow-up visit. This is the first of other planned studies, and the team is focused on determining telehealth's unique value and sharing it with the healthcare industry.

Finally, Southwest Medical plans to bring more providers on board, implementing more robust trainings and protocols to ensure providers are successful.

"SMA NowClinic truly supports two of our key metrics: access and customer service. Telemedicine helps make sure that our patients have access to their providers when they need the care, to meet their expectations for care. This access contributes to significantly greater satisfaction on the part of the patient."

-Toni Corbin, Vice President Operations, Southwest Medical Associates



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