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Pittsburgh health care firm expanding services to help employers cut costs

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A Pittsburgh digital health company is expanding to employers its chronic disease management system that helps reduce costs and improve health.

Privately held Wellbridge Health recently moved to new offices on the South Side. Founded by University of Pittsburgh School of Social Work Professor Daniel Rosen, Wellbridge's combination of mobile app and personalized approach is getting at one of the drivers of high health care costs: chronic diseases like diabetes, congestive heart failure, COPD.

"We focus on chronic diseases that can be impacted by behavior change," said Pamela Greenhouse, a longtime health-care executive and Wellbridge's COO.

Wellbridge's initial focus was on improving the health of health-plan members who have chronic diseases. Studies show 86 percent of health care spending are related to chronic diseases. Employers spend an average of \$15,000 to \$45,000 a year in direct medical costs per employee on chronic diseases, according to studies.



Pam Greenhouse, Wellbridge Health.

Wellbridge has 12 employees currently and has 2018 revenue of \$1.4 million.

Wellbridge's system gives individuals with chronic conditions an iPhone and a data plan, an app that provides daily and trending data on an individual's health, as well as masters-level health coaching by video to not only bring up issues but change behavior. Wellbridge's daily and trending information is fed into an algorithm that can be flagged for concern; Wellbridge staff don't provide medical advice but find out more information and then encourage the individual to call their doctor or seek urgent care.

"It's to stay ahead of medical crises before they become crises," Greenhouse said.

Wellbridge is now expanding its chronic-disease management services to employers, using the same system that has been used by health plans. Employers, specifically self-insured employers can be hit hard by the high cost of the care of chronic conditions.

"There's a huge market for this and lots of need if you talk to employers," Greenhouse said. The system can help with employee retention, adherence to medical advice, and ultimately lower health care spend and increase productivity by reducing avoidable hospitalizations and emergency visits.

Also new to employers is Wellbridge's ConnectedForYou, an app-based system where middle-aged people who are caregivers for aging parents or other relatives can use check-ins and regular video chats to help reduce the stress of caregiving as well as allow seniors to remain independent in their homes.

"We have found in our research that a lot of employees (with caregiving responsibilities) either miss a lot of work because of those responsibilities or they aren't as present at work, or they have to quit work sometimes," Greenhouse said.