

With NHS budgets stretched across the country the pressure is on to find better and more cost efficient ways of meeting patient needs and delivering demanded levels of service.

CMS helps AssetCo develop new ways to improve control and efficiency of Patient Transport

The area of non-emergency patient transport has come under close scrutiny in recent years, with NHS Trusts, Ambulance Services, Local Authorities and private Health Care companies all striving to find solutions that offer more control over the movement of people between their homes and hospitals for outpatient appointments.

They understand that with enhanced control comes greater efficiency, leading to a more cost effective transport service that also minimises patient waiting time.



One company leading the way in the field of PTS (Patient Transport Systems) is Leicester-based AssetCo Data Solutions, whose latest Meridian PTS helps unlock the complicated logistics that often lie at the heart of finding an effective solution, and which at the same time meets the changing needs of modern PTS departments.

Gone are the traditional time-consuming verbal instructions to drivers by radio or mobile phone. In the Meridian system these are replaced by the CMS Mobile Worker solution where wireless communication to and from the control centre takes place in real-time. This solution works on an ETEN G500 device which also has inbuilt GPS, so controllers know where the vehicle is at any moment and can plan pick-ups and deliveries with increased accuracy.

Constant, clear and reliable information

Central to the Meridian system, and a key component in its success, is the OWP (Open Wireless Platform) wireless middleware technology supplied by one of AssetCo's partners, CMS Global Technologies. This unique system, which ensures greater connection reliability and minimises data usage provides the link between the Meridian system and CMS Mobile Worker application.

Hence controllers now have constant, clear and reliable information about the situation on the ground at any time and can utilise their transport resources to maximum effect. Maps on computer screens in the control room show where any vehicle is at a given time, whilst other screens display a list of patients waiting for transport - either at home or at one of a number of different outpatient sites in the region covered. The controller simply drags the relevant patient information and drops it onto the icon of the most suitable vehicle, whereupon the information is relayed directly to the driver via a screen in his/her cab and confirmed.

“We have been delighted with the way that CMS responded to our request”

Drivers can be navigated to the exact location of a pick-up or drop using the satellite navigation system. When either has been completed they simply indicate the fact by punching a button on the in-cab screen and the system automatically updates and stores the details, including the time of collection or drop-off, for future reference. Thus Meridian can also be used to measure performance over a given period, indicate the quality of transport procedures and confirm that contractual conditions are being met.

AssetCo, part of the Brooke-Henderson Group, says its Meridian PTS takes the management and control of transporting non-emergency patients to a new level. Customers apparently like its flexibility, visibility and the fact that it can be seamlessly integrated with their existing systems, enabling them to offer transport solutions to a multi-agency environment. They also enjoy the confidence of knowing that full 24-hour support is at hand.

One of the latest customers to witness the benefits of Meridian at first hand is Parkwood Healthcare, a private company with 42 vehicles making over 1,000 patient journeys a day under its contract with North Staffs Hospital Trust. It joins an impressive list of 60 international AssetCo clients that include six UK ambulance service sites, local authorities such as Manchester City Council, most of the UK Fire Service and the Belgian Red Cross, serving the whole of Belgium.

Commenting on the system, the company’s Business Development Director Geoff Welsh says: “Meridian delivers a PTS that functions as a CAD. Thus users can plan and dispatch in a real-time environment, with dispatchers and resource managers able to monitor the visual displays and instantly know which patients are ready to move, how long they have waited, and the availability of vehicles.

“Meridian can be tailored to meet individual client requirements, can be quickly and easily upgraded as needs change, and offers a number of additional features such as contextual helps, drop down pick lists and interactive functionality icons. But importantly, it retains the graphical user interface that is already familiar to today’s PC users, whilst the Windows-based GUI interface allows for maximum user flexibility.

“We recognise that many of these features would not be possible without input from our third-party partners and we thoroughly search the marketplace to find the best available. We have been delighted with the way that CMS responded to our request and there is no doubt its OWP middleware makes a major contribution to the functionality of the Meridian system.

“The Swindon-based company had the technical knowledge we required and we were additionally impressed by its ‘can do’ approach. I am confident CMS will be able to contribute to future advances in our PTS systems,” he adds.