

# MedConnect offers high-tech messaging for physicians

by Leanne Hedrick  
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Medical house calls may have gone the way of the wagon train, but a local company is trying to help physicians stay just as accessible to their patients as the old-fashioned country doctor of past eras.

And technology – which is often blamed for reducing human interaction – is the tool bringing patients and physicians together.

“MedConnect is the only company in the country to combine the technology of two-way paging with a medical answering service,” said Sofia Wardy, the company’s owner and president. “The immediate benefit is that physicians who use our service don’t have to rely solely on a one-way pager. They get the opportunity to respond right away using a small keyboard on their two-way pager.”

When a patient or another doctor calls the service, she said, a live operator answers, takes a message then sends an e-mail type message to the physician’s pager.

When the message is received, the service gets a confirmation of the date and time of arrival. If the page is not delivered, the service knows that, too, Wardy said.

“Say a doctor is in surgery – he or she may have the pager turned off because the signals could interfere with the equipment. With a traditional medical answering service, the physician would never know he was paged and a traditional service wouldn’t follow up. Since MedConnect relies on confirmation, we know the message didn’t go through – so the operator



Sofia Wardy, owner and president of MedConnect, holds a two-way Motorola pager. MedConnect combines the technology of two-way paging with a medical answering service.

photo by Leanne Hedrick

would either wait for a later delivery after the doctor turns the pager back on – or send the message again at a later time,” Wardy said.

Getting information about patient calls or calls from other physicians is critical, said Dr. Brion Gluck, an El Paso obstetrician who uses the service. He also holds an investment interest in the company.

“I’ve used other services and they always frustrated me,” he said. “I wanted to get everything into this service that I thought was

missing from these others.”

He and his brother, Ernie Gluck – a technology expert who designs security systems – also helped develop the answering service.

“We contracted with a programmer to write code that would allow us to have the two-way page and the confirmation for message delivery,” Ernie said.

The computer programming behind the technology is the first time the application has been used in the medical answering service industry, Brion said. Its best feature is that it allows the doctors to get an e-mail from the operator, or directly from another doctor on the network, and respond in an e-

mail text message.

“With a traditional paging system, you get a phone number on your pager and you have to get to a phone to call in for the actual message – or you’re calling a number without knowing who it is or what they need,” Brion said. “Our service eliminates that aggravation because you don’t have to pick up the phone to respond – or if you do – you know who’s calling and what type of information they need.”

MedConnect offers several levels of services, Wardy said, including traditional one-way paging where the doctor only gets a page and has no way to respond. With this, the operators still get and keep confirmation records. Also, every morning, the doctor’s office will get a fax or an e-mail detailing incoming messages from the previous 24-hours.

The company’s crowning jewel, though, is the two-way service that uses small, light pagers with keyboards that are no larger than a cigarette package. The top flips up revealing a computer-like screen and tiny keyboard.

MedConnect’s Motorola pagers are worn like any other pager, Wardy said. When a message comes through, the physician is signaled by a tone or a vibration – whatever the user selects. And like a cell phone, different addresses can be assigned various tones – identifying who’s sending a message.

MedConnect opened 18 months ago and has already signed up physicians in the El Paso area and throughout the country, she said. And while it’s too soon to report revenues, Wardy said, that earnings are about what she expected this early in the game.

MedConnect employs 12 peo-

ple locally and has a strategic partnership with a 10 year-old, award-winning call center in California, Wardy said.

“When we started this process, we worked really hard to find a call center whose operators could learn the new technology, provide bilingual staffing and already knew the medical answering service industry inside and out,” she said.

Call centers specializing in answering physician calls and dealing with the physicians themselves undergo specific training, she said, so it was important to find a call center whose operators had these skills.

“That’s why we ended up going with a California call center. They offered everything we were looking for,” Wardy said. “I understand the marketing and customer service side of the business, but I needed a team of operators who were experts at answering patient calls. That was critical.”

Wardy said doctors can try the service free for one month. At the end of that time, MedConnect sends them an itemized statement that the physician can use to compare to his current service.

MedConnect’s service starts at \$60 per month, which includes a pager, faxing service, caller pre-screening, a customer service response representative – to handle things like replacing a lost pager – and the first 50 messages, Wardy said. Any calls over 50 are billed at 45 cents per minute.

“There’s a huge difference in what you get for the money,” Brion said. “We’ve found that most doctors who try MedConnect stay with it.”

For further information, call 533-9109 or visit the company’s website at [www.medconnectusa.com](http://www.medconnectusa.com).



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