



NEMT: Building the 'perfect' member trip through collaboration, technology

By Ilias Simpson, President, Mobility

In the recent past—and still existing among some companies—non-emergency medical transportation (NEMT) organizations and transportation providers (TPs) were brought together by a strictly transactional relationship. This method of running an NEMT business wasn't, and isn't, the best way to do this important work. But it took a while for large NEMT organizations, Modivcare included, to come to this realization.

While the relationships wouldn't be described as antagonistic, neither would one say that either group was always on the best of terms. Due to the transactional nature of the relationship, the groups didn't often share their expertise and experience. Which could have consequences for the individuals who required transportation to healthcare appointments. (Medicaid beneficiaries alone, for example, accounted for more than 60 million NEMT rides in 2018, according to the [Medicaid and CHIP Payment and Access Commission](#).)

Building relationships

Today, however, progressive NEMT organizations, Modivcare among them, want to do away with this suboptimal arrangement and replace it with one that benefits everyone involved:

- transportation providers,
- NEMT organizations and, most importantly,
- the individuals both serve

Modivcare, for instance, is quickly moving toward a model of working more collaboratively with transportation providers because we want transportation providers to get as much from the relationship as we do.

To help TPs, we've created three programs designed to get the most out of their collaborative relationship with Modivcare:

- [Modivcare Academy](#) is designed to help TPs work through day-to-day business challenges and learn more about promoting their business online and new ways to improve operations.
- The [Transportation Provider Advisory Council](#), where we work closely with TPs to better understand their business challenges. Our goal is to build better processes and understanding among Modivcare and the 5,500 TPs in our network.
- Modivcare Champions program is designed to help our top providers and allow both the TP and members the best opportunity for a positive experience. This allows for a more reliable and predictable experience for the members, TPs, and Modivcare.

Changing the NEMT landscape

We're working diligently to completely rework NEMT as we know it today. A big part of that is transforming the NEMT/TP relationship as mentioned earlier.

Another is the relationship between the member and the NEMT provider and the role technology plays in enhancing the experience.

One of the most significant shifts and challenges in NEMT today arises from the individual's deservedly high expectations from each ride. NEMT began and to some degree continues, as a paper-based endeavor. Today, however, consumers of NEMT services anticipate and assume the provider will deliver certain capabilities. They've come to expect the same predictive analytics and technology-based experience they get when watching Netflix or shopping or banking online.

In addition to technology expectations consistent with everyday online encounters, the member has, perhaps, even higher standards for the ride itself. Members assume the NEMT experience will be nearly identical to rideshare in convenience and quality. Riders want to:

- Use a mobile app
- Get in-app or text message updates by smartphone or cell phone, respectively
- Track the ride from beginning to end
- Communicate with the driver throughout the ride experience
- Have the ability to speak to the NEMT provider in real-time

This is, as they say, "table stakes" for every NEMT provider in 2022 and beyond. Those who don't get it right face the risk of running a failing business.

The case for rideshare

Rideshare has been a major disrupter to NEMT providers. Most significantly, rideshare operators have attracted drivers that did or may have worked in NEMT thanks to flexible schedules and other benefits. This movement impacted the number of NEMT drivers, making it more difficult to ensure members got where they needed to go on time.

In many cases, rideshare was viewed as a competitor trying to push traditional NEMT providers out of the market. We took a deeper look into the business and found rideshare could become an integral part of our strategy. Rideshare gives Modivcare flexibility to provide rides for emergent healthcare issues.

Now, working together with rideshare organizations is a critical part of the Modivcare TP network.

We use rideshare strategically in several ways for:

- On-demand member rides
- Unscheduled healthcare appointments
- Maternity appointments

The "perfect" trip

That's what we strive for every day with every member:

- On-time pick up and drop off
- Right address on pick up and drop off

- A clean, comfortable, safe vehicle
- The ability to book trips through a mobile app
- Excellent customer service

There are, however, issues, sometimes unforeseen, that make the “perfect” trip a goal that’s difficult to reach. Today, there’s a driver shortage. Wages are increasing as are fuel prices. Some drivers would rather drive for rideshares or get out of the business altogether to work in other industries that pay better and are less complex. That makes it more complicated and expensive than ever to complete a trip, much less make it “perfect.”

Then there are the uncontrollable events...severe weather, traffic delays and accidents. When any occur there’s a real chance the “perfect” ride won’t happen. That’s why real-time data and predictive analytics are so important to NEMT. These technologies can help drivers find a more efficient route to avoid an accident or expect inclement weather and schedule around it. We’d much rather anticipate issues rather than react to them.

To help predict these issues we’re building out improved operational processes, including:

- Demand planning
- Predictive analytics to anticipate trip volume
- Capacity preparation for anticipated trip volume
- TP network optimization and health

End-state NEMT

We are quickly moving toward a more member-friendly model built on modern technology standards and high-quality TP relationships.

Members expect on-time performance from every trip. We want the same and believe that updating operations and technology while building better relationships with TPs and members is the right way to get there.

When we get this right, and I believe Modivcare is well on the way, we’ll be positioned to deliver the “perfect” trip.

Ilias Simpson is President of Mobility.