

Best Buy Health shows first signs of success with Geek Squad helping at-home patients

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That next visit from one of Best Buy's Geek Squad workers might not be for help with a television or to install a speaker but instead to learn about a blood pressure cuff or set up a pulse oximeter, which then sends readings straight to a doctor.

Best Buy's foray into technology assistance for at-home health care patients has publicly reported its first signs of success, giving the retailer proof it can further expand into the health care services realm. As part of a pilot partnership with Pennsylvania-based Geisinger Health System to help monitor patients with long-term [chronic illnesses](#), Geek Squad members were able to significantly reduce the amount of time it took to set up a patient's at-home care while at the same time increasing their use of the monitoring devices.

This has helped validate Best Buy's decision to start a health division so it can leverage its knowledge and technology as an asset to health [care providers](#) while branching beyond the electronics and appliances for which it's known.

That's a necessary change for Best Buy, which has seen a lull in tech demand that has resulted in a decline in sales through the past two years. The at-home health care market can be a valuable lifeline for the future viability of the company, as it has much more consistent demand.

"The rest of the business is shrinking," said Mike Baker, a senior retail analyst with D.A. Davidson. "... (Health) is becoming that much more important for Best Buy."

Making a difference

From an internal study, Best Buy found its Geek Squad members made a tangible difference in the Geisinger program. Geek Squad members were able to set up [medical devices](#) considerably quicker than usual, leading to a 50% reduction in time—down from an average of 96 hours to 48 hours—from admission to beginning remote monitoring. There was also a 19% increase in how well patients followed their care plans by using their devices consistently and an 18% reduction in technical issues. Patients also gave the program a high Net Promoter Score, which

quantifies customer loyalty and satisfaction.

"When we look at chronic disease management programs ... we see it as a logistics challenge," said Deborah Di Sanzo, president of Best Buy Health. "And this was really our test of, 'Is this a logistics challenge where Best Buy can make a meaningful difference?' And what the results from 300 patients show us is, 'Yes.'"

The year-long test involved Geek Squad technicians—best known for helping Best Buy customers with at-home consumer tech troubleshooting—delivering and activating remote care management devices and has led Best Buy to announce plans Tuesday to expand the program to more Geisinger patients and likely other health care systems.

"It validates at least part of their health care program," Baker said. "This is the idea: to use technology to help clients in need ... to live more independently and more healthily."

Despite the [small sample size](#), the results are still an important indicator of the potential strength of the initiative, which will likely become a bigger portion of Best Buy's business eventually.

Patients using Geisinger's ConnectedCare365 platform, which it launched in 2021 during the pandemic, have [chronic conditions](#) like congestive heart failure, hypertension and diabetes. Through devices like blood pressure cuffs, body weight scales and glucose meters, Geisinger care teams receive their patients' health data through Best Buy Health's care at home platform, Current Health.

Since July 2022, specially trained Geek Squad agents have worked with Geisinger to install medical monitoring devices and also educate patients on the technology. Geek Squad members also replace devices and help with troubleshooting.

Traditionally, care teams would have to show patients how to use a device during an appointment, putting the emphasis on the patient to go home and remember how to use and connect it appropriately.

"Health care is changing rapidly, and with those changes, we are more focused than ever on moving care closer to our patients and members while simultaneously setting new standards for the quality of care they deserve," said Karen Murphy, executive vice president, chief innovation officer and founding director of the Steele Institute for Health Innovation at Geisinger, in a statement. "Working with Best Buy Health has allowed us to redefine the care experience and drive positive change in how care is provided and received."

Filling a need

The benefit of a program such as Geisinger and Best Buy's is many patients prefer the help of someone not in the medical field to simply explain technical information and it's easy for them to connect, said Joe Gaugler, a professor in the University of Minnesota School of Public Health and director of the Center for Healthy Aging and Innovation.

"Older people and their caregivers very much appreciate and rely upon human interaction to make use of the technology, and more importantly, to optimize it for their needs," Gaugler said.

Best Buy has invested more in health care technology in the past few years. In 2018, it spent \$800 million to purchase GreatCall, which it now operates as Lively, to provide cellphone service and medical-alert devices for seniors. In 2021, it acquired patient monitoring platform Current Health for \$400 million. In its stores, Best Buy has also dedicated more shelf space to devices that can improve customers' health and wellness, such as exercising equipment, recovery products, skincare devices and—after a federal ruling a year ago—over-the-counter hearing

aids.

Best Buy has toyed with using Geek Squad to help with health care concerns for years. Three years ago, Best Buy started having Geek Squad workers deliver personal emergency response systems devices, typically worn as a pendant or bracelet, and teach patients how to use them.

Besides the Geisinger program, Best Buy is also working on initiatives that could help those recovering from surgery or a sudden illness. Earlier this year, Best Buy announced a partnership with Charlotte, N.C.-based Atrium Health, the largest provider of "hospital-at-home" care in the country, to develop an improved "hospital-at-home" program for non-emergent patients.

Geek Squad workers in these programs are specially trained on topics such as patient empathy and the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA).

Having the right labor force who can communicate and educate about complicated products to people who oftentimes aren't well versed in technology will likely be Best Buy's biggest challenge going forward with growing the program, Baker said. Geek Squad employees should have some basic knowledge of the chronic conditions they are addressing to be able to understand aging patients better, Gaugler said.

Scaling and growth in health technology takes longer than with the other consumer technology Best Buy sells because in health care, companies need to be cognizant of data privacy, training and quality control on a more stringent level, Di Sanzo said.

Still, Best Buy Health has moved well past the pilot phase to become a substantial digital health business, especially as at-home health care solutions are evolving, Di Sanzo said.

"More and more care will be delivered into the home, and that care will be delivered with digital health solutions," she said. "Those digital [health](#) solutions, the patients, their caregivers, need to be trained on those solutions. Someone needs to monitor and provide maintenance to those solutions. And that's what we will continue to do. We are on a steady growth trajectory at Best Buy Health, and now with this Geisinger announcement, we've proved that what we would do helps a lot in patient care."

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