

# MEDICAL CALL CENTER NEWS

FROM ANSWER STAT MAGAZINE

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## **The Pitfalls of Call Center Multitasking**

*By Rosanne D'Ausilio, PhD*

Do you ever take several calls at once, jockeying back and forth, trying to keep each conversation separate (and remember where you left off each time)? Or how often are you on the phone with a caller, text chatting with another, and coaching a coworker all at the same time?

“Do more with less” is the unforgiving mantra of business in the medical call center industry today. Make more decisions and get more stuff done – with fewer people and less resources. Is this true for you?

A growing body of scientific research shows that multitasking can actually make you *less* efficient. Trying to do two or three things at once or in quick succession can take longer overall than doing them one at a time, and it may leave you with reduced brainpower to perform each task. That is why most call centers have their agents take only one call at a time.

Research shows that multitasking increases stress, diminishes perceived control, and may cause physical discomfort such as stomachaches or headaches – not to mention shoddy work, mismanaged time, rote solutions, and forgetfulness. Have you ever noticed that as you are working on one task, thoughts about another task (or that caller on hold) creep into your consciousness?

This doesn't mean that we can't do several things at the same time, but we're kidding ourselves if we think we can do so without a cost. The more we juggle, the less efficient we become at performing any one task. And the longer we go before returning to an interrupted task, the harder it is to remember just where we left off. Multitasking diminishes our productivity and makes us work harder just to feel like we are barely keeping up.

Research shows that the ability to multitask stems from a spot right behind the forehead. That's the anterior part of the region neuroscientists call the “executive” part of the brain – the prefrontal cortex. When we assess tasks, prioritize them, and assign mental resources, the frontal lobes are doing most of the work. This same region of the brain is where we pull off another uniquely human trick that is key to multitasking – “marking” the spot at which a task has been interrupted, so we can return to it later.

However, the prefrontal cortex is the most damaged as a result of prolonged stress – particularly the kind of stress that makes a person feel out of control and helpless. The kind of stress, for example, that you might feel when you are overwhelmed by the demands of multitasking.

Such stress also will cause the death of brain cells in another region, the hippocampus, which is critical to the formation of new memories. Damage there can hobble a person's ability to learn and retain new facts and skills.

When a person multitasks well, without errors or disastrous results, it is usually because one or more of the tasks engaged in has become automatic. For example, I can eat lunch and read the newspaper at the same time, because eating really involves no conscious thought.

In conclusion, just as multitasking has its drawbacks in business and personal activities, it can also be counterproductive and stress inducing in the medical call center. Look for ways to avoid multitasking to increase your overall effectiveness and quality.

*Rosanne D'Ausilio, Ph.D., an industrial psychologist and president of Human Technologies Global, Inc., which specializes in profitable call center operations in human performance management. Over the last twenty years, she has provided needs analyses, instructional design, and customized customer service skills trainings. Also offered is agent and facilitator university certification through Purdue University's Center for Customer Driven Quality.*

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## **CDC Uses Electronic Remedies to Combat Swine Flu**

*By Mitch Wagner*

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control uses a range of Internet services, including Twitter, YouTube, and text messaging, to head off the spread of the H1N1 flu virus. The agency will also use more traditional tools like email blasts and Web pages. The CDC's goal is to saturate the Internet with information about how people can protect themselves against the flu.

For example, the CDC has several Twitter feeds, with a total of 700,000 followers, for releasing health information. Popularity of the feeds increases exponentially during flu season.

The agency is also planning to hold Webinars targeted at independent bloggers, in the hopes that they'll help get the information out when necessary. It targets bloggers who focus on parenting issues – aka "Mommybloggers" – as well as those who focus on health issues.

This philosophy of bringing information to places on the Internet where people are, rather than requiring people to come to CDC.gov, pervades the CDC's electronic strategy. The CDC is gearing up its efforts with the approach of autumn, and the flu season, and the possibility of a resurgence of the swine flu virus.

*Taken from an article by Mitch Wagner that appeared in the August 24, 2009, issue of InformationWeek.com.*

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## **Unraveling the Sleep Cycle Mystery**

*By Peter DeHaan*



I have long maintained – and increasingly so – that my body does not comply with the "normal" twenty-four-hour sleep cycle. Among the press releases I received recently is confirmation that sleep cycle deviations can occur and that one enzyme may be the central culprit. Although I don't fully comprehend the details, I nonetheless find it interesting:

### **Central Gears of the Mammalian Circadian Clock Exposed**

"The circadian clock, a twenty-four-hour metabolic rhythm governing sleep cycles and other physiological processes, has long been known to play a central role in regulating the daily activities of living organisms. Its detailed biochemical mechanisms, however, have largely remained a mystery.

"That mystery is one step closer to being unraveled with the latest discovery by a research team led by Hiroki R. Ueda of the RIKEN Center for Developmental Biology and Joseph S. Takahashi of Northwestern University, published in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*. Researchers analyzed 1260 pharmacologically active compounds in mouse and human clock cell lines and identified ten that exerted the greatest impact on the clock cycle. Surprisingly, all but one were found to target a single enzyme (casein kinase I  $\epsilon/\delta$ ), the inhibition of which, researchers showed, dramatically extends this cycle from twenty-four hours to more than forty-eight hours.

"That the circadian clock may be regulated by relatively simple processes involving only a handful of molecules, a possibility indicated by this result, overturns conventional thinking on the topic. The more important finding that the inhibition process identified is insensitive to changes of as much as ten degrees Celcius further hints at a breakthrough in the related puzzle of temperature compensation: how circadian clocks maintain

constant periodicity over a broad range of temperatures.

"Taken together, these findings suggest the need to fundamentally revise existing models of the mammalian circadian clock. They also point the way toward novel approaches to treatment of sleeping disorders and other debilitating clock-related conditions."

When human trials begin, sign me up!

*Peter DeHaan is publisher of AnswerStat magazine and Medical Call Center News.*

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### **National Certification for Medical Interpreters – Public Call for Final Written Pilot Exam**

A call for participants has been issued in the process of establishing a national certification for medical interpreters. Building upon the work the IMIA started in the 1980s with the ultimate goal of certification, volunteers are now needed to undergo the final written exam pilot in support of national certification.

"Now that the subject matter expert review and rating of test items have been finalized, it is important that we proceed with the final pilot phase of the project," said Dr. Nelva Lee, interpreter trainer, MITIO president, and national board member. Individuals are invited to apply as of September 11 to participate in the pilot written certification exam. Recruitment is being launched at the TAPIT Conference in Nashville, Tennessee. Pilot participants will enable testing experts to test each individual test item for construct validity, relevance, and reliability. This is an important final step for moving the process of national certification forward and protecting the interest of all stakeholders that can be impacted by certification on an ongoing basis.

"We would like to finalize the pilot phase soon, so we can keep our promise to have the exams ready for the public in 2009," said Izabel Arocha, IMIA president. The oral certification pilot exam pilot was finalized at the end of August, and adaptation into other languages will start soon. Some of those who participated in the oral exam pilot have already expressed interest in taking on the written exam pilot. Others who are supportive will be involved in different ways to advocate for the process geared to the needs of specific groups such as medical interpreters, medical providers, and educational organizations. An unlimited number of individuals and organizations are eligible to participate in the task forces that were formed May 1 of this year and will work together to educate and advocate for the recognition of medical interpreting certification nationwide.

Visit [www.certifiedmedicalinterpreters.org](http://www.certifiedmedicalinterpreters.org) for more information.

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## **AnswerStat Adds Webinar Listing For Medical Call Center Events**

*AnswerStat* magazine recently launched a new Webinar section online at [www.answerstat.com/info/webinars.html](http://www.answerstat.com/info/webinars.html). The page will list upcoming industry Webinars, as well as links to recordings of past Webinars, if they are available.

“Since most Webinars do not have a long lead time, it is difficult to have sufficient notice to publish them in *AnswerStat* magazine,” stated Peter DeHaan, publisher of *AnswerStat* magazine and *Medical Call Center News*. “Adding this information to our Website, as an online exclusive, is an ideal use of the immediacy of the Internet.”

*Webinars relevant to medical call centers should be submitted to [dehaan@answerstat.com](mailto:dehaan@answerstat.com).*

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## **CareNet Named to Inc. 500**

*Inc.* magazine recently announced its annual *Inc.* 500 ranking of the fastest-growing private companies in the country. CareNet, a leading healthcare services company, ranked 487, with over 537.4 percent growth since 2005. “It is an honor to be named to the *Inc.* 500 list and a testament to the hard work of all our associates and team members,” said John Erwin, president of CareNet. “As the need for quality healthcare information and support grows, CareNet expands with it to help more people solve their health issues quickly, efficiently, and with the guidance of medical professionals who average more than fifteen years clinical experience.”

“We are proud to provide our valued clients and their members with quality healthcare support on 24/7 basis,” said CareNet executive vice president Vikie Spulak. “Each client is a partner in the mission to make a dramatic difference in their members’ lives. Our team of healthcare professionals inspires and supports millions of people on their journey toward better health.”

To learn more, visit [www.callcarenet.com](http://www.callcarenet.com) or call 800-809-7000.

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## **LVM Systems Opens Users’ Conference to Industry**

LVM Systems invites all healthcare call centers to their 2009 conference, *Essential Pieces – Supporting Your Success*. It will be held October 21-22 at the Scottsdale Plaza Resort in Arizona and offers an industry-centered agenda with

three concurrent tracks: Clinical, with continuing education (CE) contact hours offered; Marketing and Strategy; and Consulting.

Headliners include Doctors Barton Schmitt and David Thompson, who will present “Ten Pediatric Infections Not to Miss” and “Dangerous Pregnancy Symptoms,” as well as be available for clinical networking sessions and an informal Q & A.

The marketing and strategy keynote speaker is Travis Froehlich, vice president of planning for the Seton Family of Hospitals in Austin, Texas. More than twenty additional presentations will be given by call center managers and industry leaders.

Download the conference PDF at [www.lvmsystems.com/news.php](http://www.lvmsystems.com/news.php) or call 480-633-8200.

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### **Vangent and CDC Partner with Morehouse School of Medicine**

Vangent, Inc., a provider of information management and strategic business process outsourcing solutions, has partnered with the Morehouse School of Medicine (MSM) in Atlanta, Georgia, to provide job opportunities for Morehouse’s second-year graduate students pursuing a Master of Public Health (MPH) degree. Up to six students will have the opportunity to have part-time jobs supporting the CDC, responding directly to inquiries submitted by the public and healthcare professionals to CDC-INFO, CDC’s national contact center which is staffed and operated by Vangent. CDC-INFO provides up-to-date health information round-the-clock via multiple channels.

“These students will have an excellent opportunity to gain valuable on-the-job public health training to prepare them for their professional careers,” said Mac Curtis, president and CEO of Vangent. “They will interact with the public on a wide range of health information topics through one of the world’s most recognized sources of credible information.”

Vangent has more than five years of experience supporting CDC and the CDC-INFO program. CDC-INFO currently responds to more than 800,000 phone and email inquiries a year on such topics as influenza, H1N1, international travel, childhood immunizations, obesity, heart disease and stroke, adolescent health, terrorism preparedness, disease outbreaks, injuries, birth defects, HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases, and environmental threats.

For more information, contact Dex Polizzi at 703-390-1543 or [polizzi@merrittgrp.com](mailto:polizzi@merrittgrp.com), or visit [www.vangent.com](http://www.vangent.com).