



Hard Choices, Soft Options

The SleepWeaver ADVANCE Soft cloth CPAP mask design continues to build an audience by helping resellers become more competitive.

What would it take to convince non-compliant CPAP patients to give it one more try? Officials at Export, Pa.-based Circadiane believe success depends on offering something bold.

As makers of the SleepWeaver ADVANCE Soft Cloth CPAP mask, they contend they have the product that can pique curiosity and spark one more effort. For cash-strapped DME companies and self-dispensing sleep labs, the renewed focus on existing patients can boost revenue and help the business become more competitive.

David Groll, CEO of Circadiane, calls it the “revenue recovery program” and it could be one way that businesses win back existing patients and gain “new” revenue that never panned out the first time around. “In some cases, 30% to 50% of patients set up by DMEs and self-dispensing labs end up non compliant,” says Groll. “Those non compliant patients are not in the resupply stream. The problem is that *sleep labs and DMEs have not had* a product to entice them back. If you approach a *non-compliant patient* and ask ‘*would you like to try a different hard plastic mask?*’ for the most part patients will say, ‘No thank you.’”

Offering a soft cloth CPAP mask *often* yields a different response, and get that CPAP machine out of the bedroom closet. “Our product allows business to reactivate a large number of patients and get them back on CPAP,” says Groll. “Then you can sell replacement masks, tubing, and filters. This is new revenue from the existing patient database.

“If even a minority of patients can be recovered, it represents a major impact on the bottom line,” continues Groll. “We have conducted trials on small populations of patients and have had success rates as high as 70% of patients who were contacted who regained compliance. Users already have the CPAP machine in the closet, so it’s a huge win to recover that patient revenue.”

Groll believes that new market realities make these efforts all but necessary. Fortunately, identifying non compliant

patients is easier these days thanks to paperless records. Meanwhile, automated resupply systems make it relatively simple to identify patients who are *not* active in the resupply program. *A business can undergo revenue recovery without making changes to existing setup or resupply procedures. And this program does not even require the DME to invest in a CPAP machine.*

Circadiane also works with labs and DMEs to provide mailer cards marked with customized information for mailing to non compliant patients. “The long term goal is better compliance in the first place,” says Groll. “The obstacle we face is that businesses often don’t want to change. But they can offer an exciting and different product without changing their fundamental business model.”

Cutting Through the Noise

Almost 5 years after transcending the plastic paradigm, Groll acknowledges that enormous manufacturers with well-funded marketing departments can make it difficult to build awareness. “We are a small company with better solutions to the biggest problems in the market,” says Groll. “We are going up against giant entrenched competitors that have tremendous pull with customers—to the extent that they practically control customers. We have excellent success when we are able to get patients to try our product. They try it and they love it.”

The biggest challenge is getting a foot in the door to sleep labs and home care companies. The solution, says Groll, is marketing the product directly to end users who spread the message by word of mouth and Internet message boards. “Every day we get unsolicited e-mails from people who love the *SleepWeaver* mask and tell their friends about it,” he says. “That generates a lot of buzz among CPAP users who do not have a strong loyalty to any particular brand of equipment or mask. In general, their major concern is a comfortable mask that they can wear every night.”

Sleep labs have a professional interest in therapeutic compliance, but can be particularly hesitant to add new brands. “Sleep labs are used to using products that are

provided free of charge by the major manufacturers,” adds Groll. “To ask them to change to a mask that’s primary benefit is comfort requires them to make a change in behavior. Patients like it, but *labs often stick with what they know to be able to get good readings quickly, sometimes at the expense of optimum comfort.*

Typically, labs will send home the same mask that was used during the sleep testing set up. That mask is almost always a non-cloth model. “The solution to all of these problems is a more comfortable mask,” says Groll. “Businesses want a mask that is inherently easier to fit, and fits a wide variety of patients. Our mask does not create any long term negative effects of pressure sores and over-tightening of the mask. It’s great to try early in the patient’s therapy, and we encourage DMEs and sleep labs to fit patients with our mask even if it is not scripted.”

Evolution Continues

Circadiance received a lot of foot traffic at the recent Medtrade in Las Vegas. People hear about the device, and Groll admits they are often perplexed, wanting to know: How does it work?

The SleepWeaver ADVANCE with Zzzephyr Seal inflates like a balloon, conforming to the patient’s face to create a seal. Since the elastic cloth is flexible and follows the shape of each patient’s face, company officials say comfort goes up while skin irritation goes down.

Groll and his engineers improved on the old SleepWeaver with the SleepWeaver ADVANCE, a smaller unit that fit a broader range of patients, while continuing the cloth design that set the first device apart from its competitors. The new ADVANCE model continues to use fabric, and benefits from the feedback of clinicians and patients. “For sleep labs, we supply demo display units,” says Groll. “We also have special pricing for sleep labs to make the product competitively priced.”

Despite the product descriptions, those who receive demo units are usually surprised that the entire body of the mask is made of cloth, and all parts of the mask that contact the patient are made of cloth. It has no buckles, clips, or rigid features that can make a mark on the patient’s face.

Since the mask works by using the properties of a balloon, Groll explains that all points inside are of equal pressure. “If you think about it, it doesn’t make very much sense to wear plastic,” says Groll with a chuckle. “You wouldn’t wear plastic pajamas, you wouldn’t have plastic bed sheets. Everybody in the CPAP business has gotten used to the idea of using plastic on the face, but there are a lot of problems, and it causes a lot of discomfort. We have overcome all of this by changing the paradigm.”

David Groll, CEO of Circadiance is based in Pittsburgh, PA. For more information on the Sleepweaver, visit www.sleepweaver.com

Info Box: SleepWeaver Nasal Mask and Headgear uses CMS Codes • A7034 Mask • A7035 Headgear