Wireless Communications in Healthcare

Polycom® in Healthcare

Toronto General Hospital

Polycom Provides Wireless Voice Capabilities to Toronto General Hospital

Toronto General Hospital medical staff needed emergency assistance in the operating room with a double-lung by-pass patient. Doctors and nurses quickly notified all necessary staff for support by pushing a code button located on the operating room wall. The alert went out to the response team's SpectraLink Wireless Telephones and required staff responded immediately to the operating room, stabilizing the urgent situation.

Emergencies are a daily occurrence in hospitals. While excellent communications are critical to hospitals, to date, few voice solutions have been able to satisfy the demanding requirements of the health industry. But the telephone system that is streamlining communications among Toronto General Hospital medical staff is nothing short of extraordinary. In just their third day of use at the hospital, Polycom's Spectralink Wireless Telephones proved vital.

In healthcare environments, cellular telephones are not an option because of unreliable coverage and their high-power radios can interfere with sensitive medical equipment. Internal wireless networks are a better answer, and within that solution, hospitals have to take other communication concerns into consideration when choosing the most effective voice communication system. Walkie-talkies and wearable voice communication badges, for instance fail to provide doctors and nurses with the privacy that is critical to communicating sensitive medical and patient information. Spectralink Wireless Telephones exceed the privacy requirements of the healthcare industry and deliver the features of a sophisticated wired telephone, providing staff with added functionality directly from the handset and allowing staff to communicate throughout the hospital.

Calling All Hospital Staff

Toronto General Hospital sought not only a wireless voice system that could meet the hospital's stringent communication requirements, but also one that could integrate easily with its existing telecommunication and wireless infrastructure. Bell Canada, serving as a reseller for Canadian distributor Tel-e Technologies, provided Polycom's voice over Wi-Fi solution. The hospital was able to integrate its new Spectralink Wireless Telephones with its Cisco Aironet Wi-Fi access points to converge their wireless voice and data applications onto one network. Advanced telephone features were made available through integration with the hospital's Nortel Networks Meridian 1 PBX. The combined network now gives Toronto General Hospital the option to customize voice and data applications to offer its staff expanded communication capabilities.

Challenge

Enhance staff productivity and improve patients' overall experience with increased staff face time.

Solution

Polycom's SpectraLink Wireless Telephones operating on the existing Nortel infrastructure with Cisco access points.

Result

Since installing the SpectraLink Wireless Telephones patient care, response times and productivity have improved

"Coordinating 20 operating rooms, 40 to 50 surgeries, and approximately 150 staff on a daily basis is a challenge. An efficient, effective communication system is essential to achieving positive patient outcomes and staff satisfaction.

And we now have that."

Betty Watt
Nurse Manager at
Toronto General Hospitalt

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"The new integrated communication system is user-friendly, timely, accurate and adaptable to meet our changing needs both daily and long term," says Betty Watt, nurse manager at Toronto General Hospital. "The entire staff is working more efficiently now."

The hospital also integrated the Spectralink Wireless Telephones with their Rauland Responder 4000 nurse call system through GlobeStar's ConnexALL application. The alert system is then connected to each operating room suite and to the banner boards in the hallways as well as to several 52-inch plasma screens and computer monitors throughout the hallways and control stations located in the operating room. With the Spectralink Wireless Telephones integrated to Toronto General Hospital's nurse call system, nurses respond directly to a patient's room instead of checking into the nurses' station to inquire about patient calls.

"We're finding this a wonderful, easy way to communicate without all the walking," says Katherine Kohm, manager of Toronto West Hospital Emergency. "This essentially saves nurse staff seven and a half miles of walking daily from the triage area to the in-charge area. We have instant access to doctors without ever having to leave a patient's side."

Today, Spectralink Wireless Telephones are used in Toronto General Hospital's new clinical services building, operating room floor, cardiac program floors and cardiovascular surgery group.

A Successful Communications Cure

Toronto General Hospital staff not only use the 150 wireless handsets to improve response time to urgent medical situations but also to improve overall hospital efficiencies. For instance, physicians use their Spectralink Wireless Telephones in the operating room to immediately notify staff that the area is free for cleanup and ready to prepare for the next operation. The hospital estimates that wasted time in operating rooms costs the facility $85 (US) a minute - a cost that the Spectralink WirelessTelephones drastically reduce. The huge and sensitive undertaking of deploying a new and effective voice communication system is viewed as a success by patients and staff at Toronto General Hospital.

"Coordinating 20 operating rooms, 40 to 50 surgeries, and approximately 150 staff on a daily basis is a challenge," Watt says. "An efficient, effective communication system is essential to achieving positive patient outcomes and staff satisfaction. And we now have that."

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