

Integrated wireless communication

A key to making best use of limited healthcare resources

Communication systems are like the heart that pumps the lifeblood of information in healthcare. They are that important, yet traditionally such systems have not been a prioritised investment. Today, however, more and more hospitals are embracing wireless communications as a means of coping with modern healthcare demands, while providing a platform to build on for the future, explains Kirsty Duncan of Ascom.

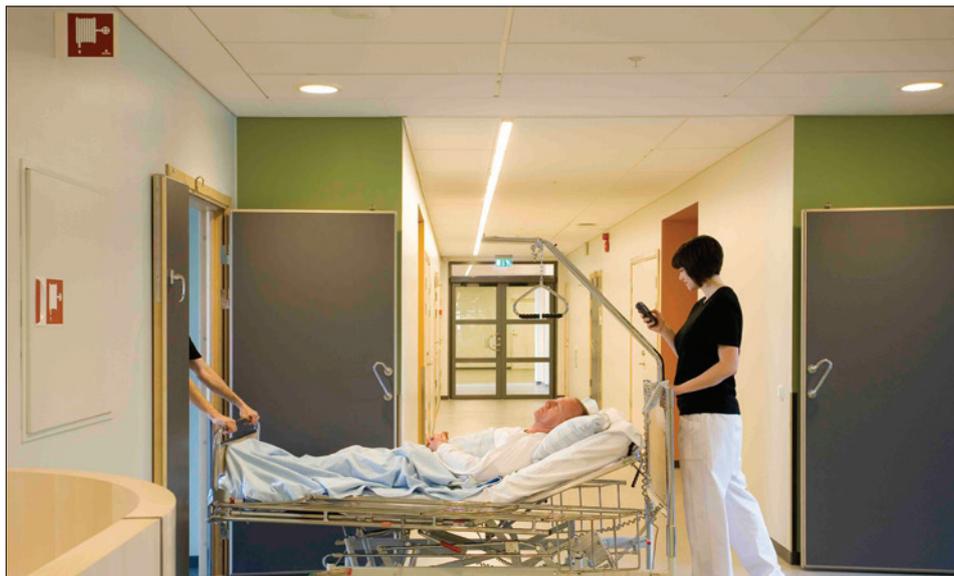
Hospitals are getting larger, sometimes including multiple sites, and comprise staff who must roam between them. With the drive to optimise workflows, reduce costs and make the very most out of limited resources, hospitals are discovering that utilising the full potential of wireless communication is a highly effective and cost-efficient way forward. Its importance in healthcare is expected to intensify over the next decade. Simply put, the speed and ease of wireless communications is something that hospitals increasingly cannot do without.

Only a few years ago, most healthcare facility executives would not even consider wireless applications, worried that the wireless systems at the time would interfere with traditional hospital wireless systems, such as telemetry. Today, this concern has been alleviated as the two systems have become more integrated and usually work in perfect harmony.

Linking two hospitals with integrated communication

A perfect example is the Southport and Ormskirk Hospital NHS Trust. Formed in 1999 following the merger of acute hospital services in the region, the trust today has 518 inpatient beds, cares for more than 260,000 patients each year, and employs around 3,500 people. According to Andrew Green, facilities manager for the trust, the primary goal was to ensure seamless links between the two hospitals, located eight miles apart. Both sites had been using a solution based on a paging system for about 20 years; the time had come to move the trust's communications forward.

After considering proposals from other providers, the trust decided on Ascom's solution. It consists of Ascom i75 Protector phones across the two hospitals, integrating with the fire systems and some security systems on both sites. Lone workers are protected by the Ascom DURAlarm package. The messaging platform is Netpage, networked across both sites, giving a wide variety of users the ability to send messages and thereby help relieve switchboard operators. A full software update is



planned in the next few weeks to enable the trust to move to Ascom's new i62 (b/g, n, a) phones for even more integration and functionality.

Faster speed to service

"Before, staff had to carry around several different devices for different needs," explains Green. "Now, with the Ascom i75 and i62, one phone does everything, streamlining what staff have to carry or always have nearby."

For the trust, wireless communications has brought about a remarkable and important improvement in their workflows, as well as linking the two hospitals to help ensure that the right people or expertise can be accessed when and where needed.

"It's really all about making best use of resources," says Green. "Freeing up the switchboard, for example. Yet the benefits of the solution are perhaps most apparent

when it comes to cardiac arrest and emergency response. We have significantly reduced time to response, and this of course means better patient care. The switchboard also receives instant confirmation that important calls have been received by the relevant handsets for crash calls, etc."

A solution to build on

The trust has been growing dramatically in recent years to keep up with the healthcare needs of this expanding region. Many staff work from two hospital sites and the value of being able to make contact with them irrespective of the site they are on cannot be underestimated.

"We also send instant messaging from our help desk system direct to the portering team's Ascom phones without any manual intervention for standard requests that users may log," says Green. "Our Ascom phones help bring it all together. This means that our need for integrated WiFi communication will continue to grow. Our wireless solution is helping us meet today's demands, but it is also a solution to build on, helping us prepare for the healthcare requirements of the future."

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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