

North Shore  
University Hospital

Communications Impact Everyone

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Persistent nursing staff shortages in the United States are pressing hospitals to optimize the productivity and efficiency of existing staff. That impetus drove New York-based North Shore University Hospital, the Nation's third largest, nonprofit, secular healthcare system, to deploy Polycom's SpectraLink Wireless Telephones.

Today, nurses, doctors, technicians and other staff carry the handsets with them as they visit with patients and administer medical care. SpectraLink Wireless Telephones operate on a wireless LAN, allowing the hospital to converge its network into one wireless infrastructure - something that was high on IT Manager Dan Spinoso's list of vendor-selection criteria.

In its vendor selection process the hospital considered equipping its staff with in-house or wide area pagers, wireless badges or cellular telephones. However, pagers did not possess the full-blown capabilities of SpectraLink Wireless Telephones, nor did they have promising features for future growth. Wireless badges were attractive to staff in specific situations such as in operating rooms, where doctors and nurses require hands-free communication, but the badges' lack of user privacy when discussing sensitive medical information, gave rise to HIPAA compliance concerns. Cellular telephones also were not a viable option for the hospital, because public carrier cellular telephones do not integrate with internal PBXs, disallowing critical internal telecom features such as dialing by extension, call transferring and conference calling. Lastly, the radio power levels used by cellular telephones could potentially interfere with sensitive hospital equipment, which could create a preoccupation with equipment malfunction and safety. "Polycom provided us with a complete solution," Spinoso says. "The fact that the SpectraLink Wireless Telephone looks, feels and works like a telephone as opposed to the badge systems we looked at, means you can have a private conversation with all the benefits of mobility," Spinoso says.

Communication Impacts Everyone

North Shore University Hospital management was not only looking to enhance staff productivity, but they wanted to improve their patients' overall experience with increased staff face time. "Direct contact with our patient population and their peers helps to make our staff's work environment more effective and more efficient," Spinoso says.

Challenge

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

Solution

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

Result

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

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IT Manager,  
North Shore University Hospital

When staff at the 731-bed hospital decided to mobilize employees with wireless handsets, they only considered vendors that could deliver a converged network. SpectraLink Wireless Telephones trumped the proprietary, separate infrastructure systems competitors offered. The SpectraLink Wireless Telephone's ability to integrate with any telecom vendor also offered North Shore the convenience to build its new converged network without vendor restrictions on the other facets of its network. The hospital, which used NEC for its existing telecom infrastructure, deployed Cisco access points for its Wi-Fi network.

The SpectraLink Wireless Telephone's ability to integrate with nurse call systems and put staff directly in contact with patients also appealed to North Shore for future application plans.

"This is a very valuable feature that set Polycom apart from the other providers," Spinosa says.

### All About Voice

As hospitals increasingly look to allow their staff opportunities to be more productive by using new technologies, voice and data applications always seem to vie for the top position in IT prioritization.

"Like many businesses, traditional data services tend to drive network installations, but in this case when our executive director asked how we could improve communication among our nurses, we knew voice was the driving application to build the first wireless infrastructure in our health system," Spinosa says.

Increased productivity from the deployment of wireless telephones provides companies with a return on investment (ROI) that helps them justify their system purchase. Since ROI often is measured in soft dollars savings, it's difficult to put numbers on paper right away.

"No doubt, it is tough to measure soft dollars, but since we installed Polycom's SpectraLink Wireless Telephones, we've already made some significant points in seeing soft dollar savings," Spinosa says.

### No Time to Waste

Prior to installing the SpectraLink Wireless Telephones, North Shore staff communicated with one another via the age-old system of "legwork." If for instance, a nurse wanted to verify medicine that was about to be administered to a patient, that nurse would have to leave the patient's bedside, go to the nurse call station, page the physician wait for the physician's return call to obtain the necessary information. It might take a nurse an estimated five to ten minutes from the time they left the patient bedside and returned. According to Spinosa, the time spent completing the communications loop created a vast waste in productivity.

"When the topic of soft dollars came up, and we discussed the amount of time nurses lose in this communication cycle, everyone in the room was nodding their head 'yes.'"

"Most of our staff is mobile and I see nurses, doctors, technicians, and engineers walking around, taking elevators, going from floor to floor with their SpectraLink Wireless Telephones," Spinosa says. "I would venture to say if I tried to take the handsets away it would be an all-out war."

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