

Hospice trusts Alcatel-Lucent

TO ENHANCE PATIENT CARE THROUGH ADVANCED COMMUNICATIONS



CASE STUDY

MARKET: HEALTHCARE

COUNTRY: U.S.



A U.S. hospice relies on Alcatel-Lucent's healthcare business team and products like the **OmniPCX** Enterprise to provide mobile, advanced communications to improve patient care



Trust, teamwork, and 'out-of-the-box' thinking are terms typically used by Suncoast Hospice to describe their on-going relationship with Alcatel-Lucent. The telecommunications company's willingness to understand hospice and palliative care, combined with its many unique IP and web-based solutions, helps the organization serve 2,500 patients daily in three of Florida's largest cities, addressing diseases like cancer and HIV/AIDS.



CHALLENGES

- Highly mobile workforce
- New VoIP system but no communications strategy
- Secure, reliable remote communications as a must
- Patient care 24/7 means no downtime
- New 'boomer' market demands quick, tech-savvy service

SOLUTIONS

- Alcatel-Lucent **OmniPCX Enterprise**
- Alcatel-Lucent digital switches

BENEFITS

- Improved staff communications
- Reliable voice/data links between sites
- Creative solutions to communications challenges

FACING TERMINAL ILLNESS

The cities and suburbs of St. Petersburg, Tampa and Clearwater in the U.S. State of Florida are unusually blessed with nearly year-round sunny weather, a beautiful Gulf of Mexico coastline, and pleasant tropical temperatures. For these reasons, hundreds of thousands of older retirees are drawn here from the northern U.S. and Canada.

However, this huge, aging population eventually faces chronic, life-threatening illnesses including cancer, advanced diabetes, and Alzheimer's disease among others. With younger and middle-aged residents, there has been a rise in HIV/AIDS as well as other debilitating, life-changing medical conditions requiring constant, daily monitoring and professional care.

When physicians can no longer medically justify keeping such individuals in a standard, general hospital bed, patients go to their homes to live with their illness. Some, who have no home, go to the streets.

But this region has a viable alternative for these people in need – Suncoast Hospice. Started in 1977 as a volunteer organization to help people cope with disease wherever they live, Suncoast Hospice today is America's largest, non-profit community based provider of in-home, palliative care services, whose medical, clinical and social services staff and nearly 270,000 volunteers serve 17,000 patients touching 200,000 lives. It last year provided more than 11.5 million (USD) in uncompensated care to the surrounding community.

COMMUNICATIONS ADDRESS MAJOR CHALLENGES

Gay Madden, Vice President of Information Systems at Suncoast Hospice, sees three major challenges to providing communications support for staff and volunteers. "The first involves mobility," she says. "Our staff doesn't stay in one place all day, because our patients are found throughout the area, including homes, nursing facilities, shelters, cars or under highway overpasses. Second, we have multidisciplinary teams led by a key caregiver visiting each patient at different times or days that typically never see each other. This includes registered nurses, social workers, chaplains and physicians. They all need to effectively interact, be it by voice, texting, instant messaging (IM) or mobile e-mail."

"We gave Alcatel-Lucent an understanding of our work, and their creative solutions resulted in excellent synergy."

Gay Madden,
Vice President Information Systems, Suncoast Hospice



The final challenge is competition. “For 30 years, we’ve been the only hospice in Pinellas County, and thanks to generous benefactors and grants, we’ve been able to serve many people without the ability to pay,” Madden says. “Now, others are vying for those valuable resources. Add to that the uncertainty surrounding political and financial changes in how healthcare will be provided in the U.S. – everything is soon going to be different.”

Madden and Suncoast Hospice strongly believe advanced communications that facilitate more mobility and quicker staff contacts are the key to success. She cites a key trend. “In this country, like many others, there was a huge influx of babies born right after World War Two,” she says. Known as ‘Baby Boomers’, this sizeable population is now reaching their 60s and 70s, and increasingly need home care and hospice services. Madden adds: “These ‘boomers’ are well educated, tech-savvy, and often financially well-off. They expect quick satisfaction and regularly interact using IMs, text paging, personal digital assistants (PDAs), smart phones and other electronic devices. So our ability to meet the healthcare needs of this key market will be driven by their high expectations that include a strong dependence on technology.”

BUILDING TRUST

Madden says the professional relationship with Alcatel-Lucent began in the conventional customer/vendor role. “We had purchased the company’s **OmniPCX™** Enterprise voice-over IP (VoIP) telephone system and associated switches and accessories, but had no communications strategy,” she says. So Madden arranged a conference call that included herself, her information technology group, and Alcatel-Lucent’s healthcare segment director to discuss this need.

Madden says: “When the healthcare segment director kept referring to a strategy to support acute care, I quickly interjected, ‘we’re hospice, and acute care is not what we do’. Her response changed everything. She paused and said: ‘I need to learn more about you. I’ll be visiting soon’.” A trusting partnership was taking form. She quickly rearranged her schedule, flew cross-country, and in less than a week, was meeting with Madden’s team in Florida. And she brought in a regional Alcatel-Lucent technical specialist to provide in-depth support to study how Suncoast Hospice functioned. They quickly developed a highly workable communications strategy for Suncoast Hospice that tailored the benefits of the VoIP and related systems to Suncoast Hospice’s needs.

“We gave Alcatel-Lucent a thorough understanding of our work, and their creative solutions resulted in excellent synergy between

our organizations,” says Madden. For example, to address a wide range of pre-existing phone technologies at different hospice locations, the VoIP system was installed with five nodes configured in a mix of IP and time division multiplexing. Furthermore, Alcatel-Lucent’s reliable data switches were installed in the organization’s three community service centers throughout Pinellas County to standardize and speed information flow on a single platform.

Additionally, an Alcatel-Lucent switch supporting a wireless local area network (WLAN) was installed in Hospice House, a 75-bed, one story acute care and end-of-life inpatient facility designed to resemble a private home. Adhering to the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE) standard 802.11, the residential wireless gateway provides, among other services, a two-way live link between inpatients and mobile hospice staff using wireless phone sets carried by each caregiver.





“When a patient or visiting family member needs quick assistance, they can immediately speak with a core team member by wireless phone wherever they are in the complex or adjacent grounds,” Madden says. “Compare this to the traditional method of summoning help using a bedside call button. Many times, the patient’s call simply causes a series of lights to flash outside each patient room, which almost always causes concern that the caregiver doesn’t see it. Such old systems detract from our residential atmosphere by looking highly clinical and sterile. Direct voice contact is far more efficient, comforting and therefore respectful to patients and their families.”

The 802.11 switch also provides broadband hot spot service within the inpatient facility so visitors can keep up with e-mails, IMs, texts, tweets and other digital contacts through their laptops or PDAs. But Madden adds the valued partnership between her organization and Alcatel-Lucent went further than simply installing new switches supporting a complex WLAN, voice and data network.

THE ‘VIRTUAL VISIT’

A unique, VoIP and web-based **OmniTouch™** My Teamwork conferencing and collaboration application available with the **OmniPCX** Enterprise is now under study and will soon be available to hospice staff via wireless laptops used by each. Madden foresees a wide range of remote and patient bedside communications, or virtual visits, using these laptops configured with My Teamwork.

“Time can be everything when a terminally ill patient needs medical attention,” says Madden. “The web-based functions of My Teamwork, such as IM, voice and a streaming video

Suncoast Hospice has a highly workable VoIP network tailored to its communications strategy.

“Alcatel-Lucent provides technology that benefits our daily work. They greatly contribute to our success.”

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component, are expected to be greatly beneficial. A nurse at bedside can recommend needed medication changes, and connect to the attending physician using text or voice, or the pharmacist to discuss drug interaction issues. What used to take hours making several phone calls to key individuals will soon take minutes using IMs or voice conferencing to multiple teams,” she adds. “This technology shows promise to quickly bring all resources to the point of care.” It may also facilitate a hospice chaplains’ rapid availability should there be a sudden spiritual need by a patient nearing death.

For widely dispersed family members, the My Teamwork function is also envisioned to be a vocal focus point so loved ones can conference into a patient’s debriefing session by the lead caregiver, or converse directly with a patient. These sessions can be recorded for later playback on the My Teamwork application so other family members in different time zones or with non-traditional work schedules can dial in to hear regular updates. “This sophisticated technology will give our widely dispersed medical, clinical and administrative staffs of about 600 the ability to effectively coordinate the daily caring for nearly 2,500 patients,” says Madden.

The healthcare segment director adds: “In such a highly mobile, dynamic enterprise, Alcatel Lucent enables and empowers this organization to work more effectively by using networks and applications to connect people with processes and knowledge.”

Madden agrees. “Their innovative R&D capabilities, creativity and willingness to listen results in many ‘out-of-the-box’ solutions that helps us better serve people at their most vulnerable time.”