

# TIMING – AND ACCESS – IS EVERYTHING

In our information age, quick access to data can be the key success factor. Knowledge is power, as they say. If your client is a patient with severe health problems, the speed of access can be essential.

When UroPartners, an integrated urology practice based in Westchester, IL, began planning the implementation of its Electronic Health Records (EHR) system, most of its 31 Chicago-area offices were paper-based. As a result, a potential scenario made accessing a patient's records difficult if physicians needed them out of their offices. "If the doctor is seeing a patient in the hospital, the doctor needs to know what medications the patient has been taking or what past surgeries the patient has had," says Natalie Gulotta, Director of Health Information Systems at UroPartners. Outside of normal business hours, access to the records could be difficult. Doctors would have to remember what was on the patient's chart, go to the office and retrieve the records themselves, or wait for the notes faxed over from the office when the staff comes in – the next day.

But the EHR will eliminate that scenario. "This connectivity allows us to give quick access to patient health information," says Natalie. "Because we're a specialty organization, we often take care of very ill patients who need immediate care. That's why we need to provide secure, 24/7 access to the patient health records that physicians need."

## ENSURING PRIVACY AND SECURITY

Providing access to personal health information isn't simply a matter of posting records online. The 2003 Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) sets privacy standards to protect patients' medical records and other health information provided to health plans, doctors, hospitals and other health care providers. The transfer of medical information must be confidential and cannot be available over the public Internet. In order to implement an EHR system, UroPartners needed a private, HIPAA-compliant network.

What UroPartners needed, says Mike Bencic, their CIMCO Account Manager, was Multi Protocol Label Switching (MPLS), a centralized, private and secure network that transfers data over a Wide Area Network. "In the healthcare industry, people's lives are at stake," says Mike. "Information needs to be accessible at any hour of the day. At the same time, such a system needs to comply with HIPAA standards and practices."

Natalie found that the MPLS system is able to accommodate the need for records access as well as provide significant support in management and administration. "Management is

a challenge when you have so many different offices," she says. In the past, each office had its own independent IT and networking companies. "Every time we had an issue with the Virtual Private Network, we had to troubleshoot. What exactly is the problem to get the office back up? Is it on their end or our end? That used a lot of my staff time – and time is money." In addition, UroPartners needed a system that would help with the billing and lab work for its urology clinics.

"CIMCO had all of those advantages; they had everything in place. They provided us with the level of service we that needed and a cost-effective solution," says Natalie.

## PREVENTATIVE MEDICINE

The MPLS system has given UroPartners the ability to monitor its sites. "I think the management piece of it has been the greatest benefit to UroPartners," says Natalie. "We do a lot of 'dashboarding' to find out what's going on at our sites, the traffic going back and forth, and utilization of the line to see if a site is reaching peak capacity."

She recalled one telling example when a site contacted her office complaining about latency (that is, slow Internet

access). "We were able to check a lot of things directly and instantaneously by going onto the dashboard from the time that the complaint came in." Based on their analysis, Natalie's staff identified a possible cause in the high rate of utilization. Natalie had CIMCO implement its Quality of Service control mechanisms to prioritize the voice, data and Internet traffic over the system at the site.

"Without all these tools, identifying the problem would have been extremely difficult," admits Natalie. "We've been able to do a lot of our troubleshooting and solutions implementation without ever having to go on site."

In addition, CIMCO provides certified technicians trained to monitor and manage its routers in real time. "There have been several times that CIMCO has contacted us before we realized that an office was down," says Natalie. "Even when it's after hours and the power has gone down in a building, CIMCO has contacted us."

## HEALTHY BENEFITS

Because the MPLS is a private network, UroPartner sites that utilize Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) on the system have seen their phone bills go down.

"On VoIP, we did experience significant savings. Some of our offices realized up to 40 percent," says Natalie. "And we definitely experienced a savings on our network connectivity. The cost savings has been a big benefit to UroPartners as a whole."

So far, the implementation has been transparent to the end users, according to Natalie. "We haven't completely connected yet. It's been a rollout process, based on existing contracting. I believe at this point that we're about 75 percent implemented across all of our offices. We are looking to get 100 percent implementation in the next couple of years." She adds that as UroPartners grows, the system will grow with it.

But the system's greatest benefit for UroPartners? "I would say it's the centralization," says Natalie. "Having a private Internet cloud for UroPartners, we can see everything that's occurring

within our network and actually have the management capability to handle all of our sites. When you have a large organization like ours with so many offices, that's really key in managing the IT."

## ABOUT CIMCO

CIMCO has been providing technology solutions to businesses in the Chicago area for 25 years. CIMCO combines its scalable, stable data and voice infrastructure with technologically diverse expertise to provide a broad suite of products and services. Customers experience the passion for extraordinary service in the responsible, knowledgeable and personable way CIMCO meets their needs. For more information, see [www.CIMCO.net](http://www.CIMCO.net).

## ABOUT UROPARTNERS

UroPartners is an integrated urology practice with multiple locations throughout Chicagoland. The physicians of UroPartners are all board-certified specialists in urology whose skill and expertise combine to provide today's most innovative treatments for urological disorders. UroPartners is a practice founded on the principles of innovative urological care combined with skill and experience. The physicians and staff of UroPartners treat each patient as a partner in the treatment of his or her own urological condition, and patient education is central to this organization.



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