



VoIP for Maryland Healthcare Providers *The Right Prescription* by Jeff Nolte

Voice over the Internet Protocol, known simply as VoIP, started out as a means of saving on long distance calls, and was considered too unreliable for business use, much less for the demanding healthcare environment. All this has changed. Now hospitals, physician practices, and clinics throughout Maryland are eager to move voice calls to their data networks to cut costs, improve communications and extend opportunities for patient care.

Group Oncology Practice

An oncology practice in Maryland uses IP Telephony to unify its communications. Staff voice mails are delivered to email inboxes, accelerating the turnaround on important messages from colleagues and patients. Nurses, who are always on the move, are equipped with convenient wireless IP phones so they can be accessible, regardless of where they may be working in the office. According to the practice administrator, the IP phone system enables clinical and administrative staff to stay connected so they can respond to patient needs in a timely manner.

Sports Medicine Center

A sports medicine center, with offices throughout Maryland, provides thousands of patients with comprehensive musculoskeletal care. The center's practice administrator notes, "The great thing about IP voice communications is that this technology lets you grow and add locations without impacting patient care or losing touch with staff." After installing an IP voice network linking all four locations in Maryland, the group can now expand geographically without sacrificing patient care or handling via a unified communications solution. The IP network

allowed the practice to centralize scheduling, eliminate redundant lines, and reduce inter-office calling and long distance charges, resulting in the addition of tens of thousands of dollars directly to the bottom line.

Community Clinic

A Baltimore-based clinic, with three locations, supports diverse, medically underserved communities, recently implemented an integrated voice and data network. The IP phone system enables convenient 4-digit dialing between offices. The centralized voice mail helps the staff stay in touch with patients, and pickup messages no matter which clinic they happen to be working. Tele-commuters connect from their homes and access all the phone system features they are accustomed to using at the office.

The clinic's network administrator even became certified by the manufacturer to perform technical work on the IP phone system, saving the clinic on the cost of third-party support services.

Hospital

Today's IP phone systems are quite flexible too. Recently, a hospital serving eastern shore communities in Maryland underwent a large expansion, adding a new wing. The hospital's telecom manager took this opportunity to add an IP phone system. Instead of buying hundreds of new phones, he chose an IP phone system that was able to network with the old phone system, preserving the previous investment.

With staff and volunteers constantly on the move, the hospital's overhead paging system was set up so any phone can be used to

Healthcare Administrator



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broadcast announcements. To increase staff mobility and access to patients, the new phone system was equipped with wireless IP phones. According to the telecom manager, "Our new communications network is already changing how we work, and makes a real difference everyday."

Regional Physician Group – Southern Maryland

Another convert to IP Telephony is a regional physicians group providing health services and ongoing care and treatment to patients throughout Southern Maryland. When the vice president began looking for a communications network that would grow with them, he went with an IP phone system to connect the group's headquarters to remote doctors' offices and surgical centers. High capacity digital links provide access to the Internet and a Virtual Private Network (VPN) interconnects all the office locations.

The IP phones are powered across existing network cabling which reduced upfront installation expenses for separate electrical wiring. Phone system features are extended to physicians' homes using broadband Internet connections. This allows doctors to pick up emergency calls, access their voice messages, and communicate more easily with their office, from their home.

Regional Physician Group – Central Maryland

A network of physician practices with 10 locations throughout Central Maryland also using IP Telephony. Its information systems director opted to try the technology in a non-critical care setting, choosing the headquarters location where the existing phone system was near the end of its useful life.

The IS director now manages the new IP phone system from his PC, and he has the ability to set up physicians' offices with all the features they need as they come online. And with each desktop computer able to place and answer phone calls as an alternative to traditional phones, physicians and staff have convenient access to messaging and collaboration functions.

Transforming Healthcare Delivery

In the increasingly competitive healthcare market, every technology must be thoroughly evaluated not only for cost savings, but for its ability to unify the organization, improve staff performance and extend care to patients. IP Telephony now meets all of these criteria.

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