

Community HealthCare System

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Dominic Freeman, Network Administrator, Community HealthCare System

Challenge

Health care providers rotating between five rural locations need instant access to digitalized patient files

Nonprofit organization has limited budget for wireless networking

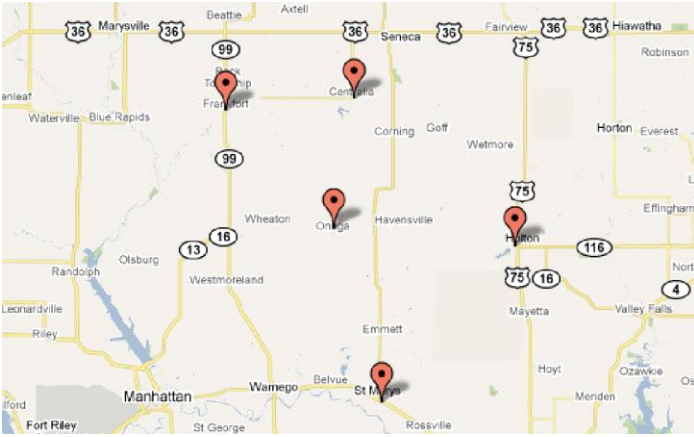
Wireless access for patients and families must not compromise network security

Results

70 Meraki MR14 APs provide seamless roaming across all facilities

Meraki's Enterprise Cloud Controller enables easy, centralized network management

Separate SSIDs for hospital guests and for assisted living residents isolates LAN and maintains HIPAA-compliance



Five centrally-managed facilities across Kansas

Community HealthCare System, a nonprofit medical organization based out of Onaga, Kansas, covers five rural locations and includes two hospitals, five rural health clinics, two long-term care facilities, an assisted living facility, and at-home health care. The two main clinics see well over 100 patients every day.

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Although Onaga is at least an hour away from any big city, Community HealthCare System still strives to provide the latest healthcare technology and the best patient service. Wireless networking plays a role in this, says Dominic Freeman, Network Administrator for Community HealthCare System, because the 25 health care providers on staff often rotate between facilities and require seamless roaming laptop access to retrieve and update patient information.

"All wireless is the way to go in our eyes," Freeman said. "Soon we want to see the staff carrying laptops into patient rooms and documenting everything by the bedside. That system prevents miscommunication or misdiagnosis and promotes better care, and it's a lot easier in the long run."

For several years Community HealthCare System used Buffalo Wireless at its main location, but the network was unreliable. "We tried implementing wireless carts for nurses, but it was a huge flop," Freeman said. "Buffalo didn't have the technology for seamless roaming, so we ran into a lot of issues. Eventually we just let it get old."

Freeman wanted to implement a superior wireless solution, but as a nonprofit organization, "we didn't have a ton of money to spend," he said.

Freeman's IT team manages all of Community HealthCare's computers and its network from the headquarters in Onaga. Every location has an edge router handing a point-to-point VPN tunnel over a T1 line back to corporate headquarters, along with an HP gigabit LAN switching infrastructure.

Focusing on multiple-facility seamless roaming, centralized network management, and affordability as primary objectives, Freeman compared solutions from Meru, Cisco, HP, and Meraki. "Our choice to go with Meraki was twofold," Freeman said. "First, nobody else's pricing could touch Meraki's. Second, Meraki is a dream to use."

Community HealthCare System purchased 70 Meraki MR14 access points (APs), planning to place 60 in existing facilities and save 10 for a new hospital. Freeman first deployed wireless across the two largest facilities. Though he initially questioned how the APs, which maintain secure connections to Meraki's Cloud Controller, would interact with his tightly controlled firewall policies, he says he found the process remarkably straightforward. The firewall only needed to permit outbound connections from the access points to the Meraki Cloud Controller.

"After that, it was as easy as adding a serial number to the Meraki Dashboard, which adds the AP to the wireless network configuration you want," he said. "It was the most seamless, easy installation of wireless I have ever touched."

The wireless network is primarily intended for Community HealthCare System's staff, but Freeman also enabled an isolated virtual network (SSID) for guest access. "We provide access to patients and guests off Meraki's DHCP," Freeman said. Maintaining network security was as easy as choosing 'Prevent wireless clients from accessing my LAN' under the Configuration

Community HealthCare System At A Glance

Five rural locations

70 Meraki MR14 access points

Three SSIDs (one each for staff, guests, and residents)

Guests authenticate using hosted RADIUS solution

tab of the Meraki Dashboard. "I love that feature—it means they can't touch our server."

Meanwhile, the patients love having access to wireless. "That's really where we've gotten the biggest response," Freeman said. "It's the wave of the future. People expect to have wireless everywhere."

Guests sign on to the network through a splash page and are authenticated with Meraki's hosted RADIUS solution. With Meraki's Guest Ambassador feature, predefined staff can assign individual guest usernames and passwords at their own facilities.

Last week Freeman deployed wireless across Community HealthCare System's assisted living facility and configured an additional SSID for the residents. "Some of them have laptops, and others are excited to get laptops now that wireless is available," he said. "Before, we had one community computer that everyone used. Now people can bring the internet into their private rooms if they want to."

Community HealthCare System will soon roll out wireless to its three smaller facilities, and then Freeman said he hopes the doctors and nurses will leave their paper charts behind. Already, he said, "the facility to facility movement with laptops has been great." And

while the medical staff may only notice that the wireless simply works, Freeman said the IT department "recognizes that Meraki is a dream come true."



The wireless network also provides access to guests and patients