

The Coalition of Orange County Community Clinics

Since 1974, the Coalition of Orange County Community Clinics (COCCC) has been dedicated to building and strengthening a community-wide system of comprehensive, high-quality, accessible, and affordable health care. The Coalition provides a forum for sharing ideas and developing strategies to help participating clinics meet the health care needs of uninsured and underinsured individuals in Orange County, California.

The Challenge

In 2006, the Coalition realized that outdated systems and processes were reducing operational efficiencies and hindering their ability to deliver high-quality health care services to patients. As a result, they applied for a grant from Cisco in hopes of establishing a secure and reliable VPN network connecting all member clinics to the COCCC data center.

The Solution

In November 2006, Cisco awarded the Coalition a grant of approximately US\$240K worth of networking equipment to support the implementation of a robust VPN solution. Planned enhancements included the following:

- The development and release of an integrated management system that allows clinics to transmit patient demographics and treatment records to a central data storage center for use in quality improvements, population studies, and aggregated reported
- Remote IT support and diagnostic tools
- Network security enhancements to replace basic firewall capabilities in compliance with HIPAA regulations for patient privacy and security
- Secure wireless network capabilities to provide immediate access to patient records
- The establishment of a Technical Services Organization (TSO) that is dedicated to providing systems support and managing electronic health records for all member organizations and clinics
- Participation in a regional health information exchange program to share patient information with local health organizations

Impact

The Cisco equipment provided by this grant was installed and implemented at 10 clinics by the end of April 2007. This represents more than half of the clinics participating in the Coalition. As a result of these upgrades, system reliability has been greatly enhanced; leading to a 75 percent reduction in unexplained network outages, and cost savings of approximately \$100K each year for the Coalition and participating clinics. The upgraded VPN network has also generated additional savings by eliminating the need for four onsite visits to each clinic every month, allowing the Coalition to avoid approximately \$20K in travel costs per year.

As a result of these enhancements, clinics with access to the updated management system have improved the quality of care provided to patients. At Lestonnac Free Clinic, for example, a doctor was able to quickly and accurately diagnose a patient with diabetes due to increased access to patient records. The clinic has also started using patient identification cards, which contain digital information about each patient. One of the goals of the cards is to encourage patients to view the clinic as a viable alternative to hospital emergency room visits. Nurses and medical assistants at Lestonnac have also begun using the new software to track and use vital statistics more efficiently.

Future Plans

The goals related to management system implementation and information sharing among member clinics have been only partially met, and the Coalition is currently seeking additional sources of funding to bring these plans to fruition. When all clinics begin using the updated, networked system, the Coalition anticipates additional gains in process efficiency and improved patient care.

Client Testimonial

“The systems I’ve used throughout my career were rather dated and we relied more on the old fashioned pen-and-paper method when charting. This can sometimes make it difficult to track patient progress and gather data. In the last year, the advances in technology made possible by Cisco’s equipment grant and help from the Coalition of Orange County Community Clinics have greatly reduced the amount of time we’ve spent recording data by hand and enabled us to use a network and computer system to enter clinical data, which has provided us with more accurate patient information and reporting features.”

Dr. Rashmi Patel
Lestonnac Free Clinic



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