

## The Network as Medicine: Free Internet and Phone Service for Wounded Warriors

Emotional support from family members and friends can play an important role in the medical healing process, and now burn patients at the Brooke Army Medical Center (BAMC) are getting more of that support with free Internet and phone service over an IP network. Patients appreciate being able to stay in touch with relatives and friends, and their family members can use the Internet to work remotely as they stay by the bedside of a loved one.

### A Need for Personal Network Use

BAMC, at Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio, Texas, is the world's premier severe-injury and burn center, treating and rehabilitating burn patients from the Department of Defense (DoD). Four 5,000- to 16,000-square-foot homes donated by Fisher House Foundation provide a total of 58 suites for wounded warriors, who live there while they recuperate, sometimes as long as three years. Each suite accommodates a patient and two to four visitors, who enjoy home comforts such as a kitchen, laundry facilities, a living room with a library, and even children's toys.

But until 2005, the BAMC Fisher Houses could not offer Internet and voice services to patients and their visitors. DoD regulation Information Assurance Policy (AR 25-2, 4-5R4) prohibits personal use of its data and voice system, which forced patients and family members to pay for long-distance phone calls and go elsewhere for Internet access. Lacking free Internet access, family members could not take advantage of their employers' offers to telecommute, forcing them, in some cases, to choose between keeping their jobs or remaining with recovering relatives.

### Operation Comfort

Help came from Cisco® and Operation Comfort, a San Antonio-based nonprofit organization dedicated to improving the lives of wounded warriors recovering at BAMC. Operation Comfort teamed with Cisco to provide Fisher House patients and their families with free voice and Internet service. "We did not feel that wounded warriors or the loved ones residing with them should have to pay to communicate with family and friends," says Bruce Klein, Cisco Federal Area vice president.

In the fall of 2005, Cisco worked with BAMC to build a data and voice network in the Fisher Houses that is totally separate from the DoD network. Now patients and their family members can enjoy free wireless broadband Internet access from their own laptops and make free phone calls using Cisco Unified IP Phones. Unlimited free long-distance service is provided by Time Warner Telecom, based in Littleton, Colorado.

### Morale Boost

"We began the rollout in the burn ward before progressing to several waiting rooms, and eventually to the Fisher Houses and even the barracks," says Lieutenant Colonel Peter V. Marks, Ph.D., chief information officer, Brooke Army Medical Center. "The system is incredibly easy for users. They just log onto the Internet or pick up the phone and talk."

Russ Fritz, assistant manager at BAMC Fisher Houses, reports that the Cisco solution is improving the quality of life for wounded warriors and residents at the Fisher Houses. "Wounded warriors eager to stay in touch with friends and family used to inundate us with requests for calling cards," he says. "The Cisco solution has negated the need for those entirely. It makes their stay here easier, especially when they have other family and children at home."

Officials at Fisher House and Operation Comfort note that patient recovery and rehabilitation success increase significantly when family are nearby. "Now soldiers can talk and cry with family in the privacy of their own room, and families can stay in touch with loved ones at home without worrying about expenses," says Janis Roznowski, founder and director of Operation Comfort. Adds Fritz, "There is no doubt that family love is the best medicine."

### For More Information

To read the full case study, visit [www.cisco.com/web/strategy/docs/gov/BAMC\\_cs.pdf](http://www.cisco.com/web/strategy/docs/gov/BAMC_cs.pdf).



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