

MULTICARE LEVERAGES AIRWAVE TO MANAGE CISCO AND NORTEL WIRELESS LAN



When a Pacific Northwest healthcare group started to deploy a Wi-Fi network, there were few indicators of how fast demand would grow. After a neighboring hospital joined the group and with a large facility under construction, the IT staff at MultiCare is glad it chose AirWave Wireless Management Suite™ from Aruba Networks to manage its multi-vendor wireless LAN (WLAN).

MultiCare is a leading-edge integrated health organization based in Tacoma, Washington. It is centered on four large hospitals with numerous primary care and urgent care clinics, hospice and home health services, and many other services. A not-for-profit organization, MultiCare has grown over the years in response to community needs and its mission of delivering high-quality, patient-centered care. Technology is one of the key strategies that MultiCare uses to achieve its vision, a commitment that comes from the top. MultiCare's President and CEO Diane Cecchetti, RN, was recognized by Modern Healthcare magazine and the Healthcare Information and Management System Society (HIMSS) with their 2008 CEO IT achievement award. MultiCare was one of only three hospitals in the US to receive this award.

MultiCare's IT team delivers services in support of all integrated wireless LAN technology to help meet those needs. Luis Coloma, network services analyst at MultiCare, began deploying the first WLAN in 2006 utilizing Nortel equipment from OEM Trapeze Networks. The original deployment covered three hospitals and consisted of more than 1,000 802.11 b/g access points. As is typical of many organizations, Luis was tapped to be the wireless "guy" despite having no formal training in RF or wireless LANs. His prior responsibility was managing the MultiCare WAN. "Our initial pilot was deploying an entire building, which represented a steep learning curve for all of us. But once we deployed the network and opened up access, it caught on like wildfire. Utilization soared because everyone loved it. We easily surpassed the initial goal, which was to enhance productivity and match services provided by other neighboring hospitals," said Coloma.

The wireless LAN at MultiCare offers nine separate SSIDs or access methods, supporting hot-spot access for waiting rooms and guest rooms; secure employee network access; specialized medical devices like IV pumps; secure contractor access and wireless robots for food servicing. New applications arrive frequently, for example the IT group is currently testing a Wi-Fi connected ultrasound machine.

WIRELESS NETWORK SIZE:

- 1,000 wireless access points across 93 locations
- Four major hospitals

HARDWARE:

- Nortel (Trapeze OEM)
- Cisco LWAPP

AIRWAVE PRODUCT:

- AirWave Wireless Management Suite™ from Aruba Networks Professional Edition

AIRWAVE BENEFITS:

- Client-level visibility
- Multi-vendor management support
- Trend reporting
- Remote troubleshooting

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Luis Coloma
Network Services Analyst III
Multicare Health Systems

Based on its initial success and the explosion of demand, it became readily apparent that the wireless LAN was becoming a mission critical piece of the network. This was a significant milestone for Coloma, and over time he developed management and reporting procedures for the initial, single-vendor network.

But soon he was presented with a new WLAN challenge. In 2007 a neighboring hospital, Good Samaritan, joined the MultiCare family and brought its own WLAN under the expanded IT group's responsibilities. The network now included Cisco access points as well as Nortel/Trapeze equipment. "We were very happy to have Good Sam as part of our network but, as with most mergers, they had their own infrastructure and tools. I quickly realized that I had two disparate WLANs with two different sets of management tools. As the network became more and more important on a daily basis I realized I needed better visibility and a single platform to manage everything," commented Coloma.

Undaunted, he embarked on a search for a management platform that could support his existing WLANs as well as providing wider flexibility for a new hospital, then in the planning stages. "I really needed to monitor the entire WLAN. AirWave was the only provider we could find that managed both the Nortel and Cisco equipment seamlessly. Having visibility in bandwidth utilization, trending reports, uptime and individual user sessions has been huge for us. Aruba's technical support has been a huge factor in helping us deploy the solution and figure out the best ways to use the system moving forward," Coloma said.

Next up for Coloma will be the deployment of a WLAN in the new hospital. "Now that we are in the planning stages for this new facility questions have come up about our current WLAN supplier and which platform we should choose going forward. Having a multi-vendor management platform is even more critical now because of the flexibility that it gives us," said Coloma.

ORGANIZATION OVERVIEW:

MultiCare is a leading-edge, integrated health organization made up of four hospitals including Allenmore Hospital, Good Samaritan Hospital, Mary Bridge Children's Hospital and Tacoma General Hospital, numerous primary care and urgent care clinics, multi-specialty centers, Hospice and Home Health services, and many other services. A not-for-profit organization based in Tacoma, Washington since 1882, MultiCare has grown over the year in response to community needs. Today we are the area's largest provider of health care services, serving patients at 93 locations in Pierce, South King, Kitsap and Thurston counties.



www.arubanetworks.com

1344 Crossman Avenue, Sunnyvale, CA 94089
1-866-55-ARUBA | Tel. +1 408.227.4500 | Fax. +1 408.227.4550 | info@arubanetworks.com