



Advocate Health Care

Quality IT Support Is Linked to Quality Patient Care

Profile:

One of the top 10 health systems in the U.S. based on clinical performance, and one of the largest health care providers in the Midwest

Industry:

Health care

Network:

- 27,500 Windows PCs
- 750 Windows servers
- 450 locations

Solution:

- Ivanti Management Suite

Key Benefits:

- Technicians no longer take inventory and install software by hand
- PCs increased from 4,500 to over 25,000, but are managed with less technical staff
- Software-distribution and remote-control cost avoidance of \$1.25 million a month
- Consistent desktop settings make PCs easier to support

Advocate Health Care, headquartered in Oak Brook, Illinois, is one of America's top 10 health systems. It operates more than 450 sites of care, including 12 acute-care hospitals, two integrated children's hospitals, and one of the state's largest home health companies. It is also one of the largest nongovernment employers in the greater Chicago area with approximately 35,000 associates; 11,000 nurses; and 6,300 associate doctors. Advocate Health Care also has the largest emergency and level I trauma network in Illinois and trains more primary care physicians and residents at its four major teaching hospitals than any other health system in the state. As a not-for-profit, faith-based health system, Advocate Health Care contributed \$686 million in charitable care and services to communities across metropolitan Chicago and central Illinois in 2015.

Challenge: Provide Superior Technology and Support to Caregivers

Modern medicine depends on computer technology. Even the most basic of procedures, a physical checkup, begins with a physician typing a patient's medical history into a laptop. And the advances that improve health care and help extend life spans—MRI scanners, X-ray machines, blood analyzers, for example—all run on technology. But who keeps the technology running? Health care IT departments. "It's not an overstatement to say that in a patient-care setting, the role of IT can be a matter of life and death," said Dan Lutter, Director, Field Technology Services for Advocate Health Care. "Our IT department's responsibilities go beyond being simply mission critical. We support and basically collaborate with the doctors, nurses, and other care providers to create the best environment for our patients to heal, our physicians to practice, and our associates to work."

A Full Inventory Was Not Possible

That's a big task with its own set of challenges. "Keeping track of assets is important for any organization," continued Lutter. "It was difficult to do that with precision because our PCs are spread over so many locations. As a result, we only conducted inventory on a per-project basis, and only for the PCs involved in the project. For example, if we needed to upgrade a major application on several hundred machines, we sent technicians to inventory each PC because, back then, environments were more client based than Web based. So we needed to know if each workstation met the upgrade requirements. If another project came up three weeks later, we would do the same process all over again. When technicians are doing inventory, they can't do their real job, which is supporting users. And this approach lengthened the time of each project and affected user productivity because they had to log off their PCs while technicians took inventory."

No Standard PC Settings

Distributing software was also a time-consuming task that required technicians to visit each workstation. "Before, we would walk around with a handful of DVDs and install new applications, upgrades, and patches by hand," said Tom O'Brien, Lead System Administrator. "Such a process left us open to human error in the sense that some machines could get overlooked or not have all of the upgrades or patches installed. It also meant the settings on our PCs were not standardized across our environment. If you have 10 technicians installing applications, you are going to have 10 slightly different setups.

That had a ripple effect. When supporting those machines later on, you had to spend time checking the PC in question because you could not count on the settings being the same.”

Inadequate Remote Control Tools

Some of Advocate’s clinics and other locations used a remote-control device to help cut down on travel time, but the tools were almost more trouble than they were worth. “The devices had limited security, no uniformity of operation, no centralized logging or auditing capabilities, and they could not search for a PC in a database,” explained O’Brien. “We also had to know the IP address of a machine to take control of it. So these devices offered very limited help. As our IT assets and the number of locations continued to expand over the years, our need for an automated management system rose exponentially. We knew a tipping point was coming, a time when we could not continue to do so much manual work and still meet our goal of properly supporting our caregivers and, in turn, their patients.”

Solution: Replace Manual Management System with an Automated One

Advocate’s IT department took a proactive approach to finding a solution and researched the top three automated management systems on the market. “We chose Ivanti Management Suite because it provided the most functionality for the price and was the easiest product to use,” said Lutter. “It’s very cost effective, and we liked the fact that system management was Ivanti’s only business. We knew they would continue to develop and mature their products, and that gave us a high level of comfort with the company and the suite.”

600 Percent Increase in PCs, but They Need Less Staff

Now, an IT technician can inventory every asset on the system in a matter of minutes. “We no longer have to send people onsite to take inventory,” said O’Brien. “It’s impossible to quantify exactly how much time and overhead that eliminates. But to put it into perspective, when we installed Ivanti we had about 4,500 PCs. We now have 27,500, but we need less staff today to support six times as many machines.”

\$1.25 Million Per Month in Cost Avoidance

Advocate realized similar economies when distributing software and managing machines remotely. “Because our hospitals pay the annual maintenance fee to manage their systems,” said Lutter, “I wanted to find a way to show them the value of our services. After crunching some numbers, we determined that each time a technician visited a machine to install software or perform a support task, it costs an average of \$25 per visit. Today with Ivanti, we average 50,000 software distributions and remote-control sessions a month, which comes to \$1.25 million each month in cost avoidance. Our hospitals, of course, pay nowhere near that figure, but it does showcase the value of the services a desktop management tool provides.”

Advocate also now has consistent desktop settings across the enterprise. “In addition, the solution distributes software packages, making every installation the exact same,” noted Lutter. “We now have a standardized environment, which makes supporting those workstations even easier. Plus, with Ivanti we can remotely control and manage laptops and other PCs that are not on the network, so no machines are skipped when it comes to inventory, patching, and other management tasks.”

The Old Way Is No Longer an Option

The IT department’s goal is to support what the clinical staff is doing on the front lines. “We’re not just about implementing technology,” said Lutter. “We’re about saving lives, and Ivanti impacts the work our caregivers do by enhancing the support we deliver to doctors and nurses on a daily basis. The solution also allows us to better manage costs as an IT organization and as a company because we can grow without adding resources. In fact, we’ve been able to repurpose resources to provide even more value to the organization as a business partner to different clinical groups. The benefits are significant. If an organization has 100 or more workstations, I don’t know how they can get by without an automated management tool. I know we couldn’t.”

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