Medical staff and patients demand Wi-Fi access in hospitals

Wi-Fi networks designed specifically for hospital use are catching on around the world, as both staff and patients see the multiple benefits of secure network access, said Networks Unlimited.

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Anton Jacobsz, MD of Networks Unlimited, an Aruba Networks distributor said that, along with hotels, retail areas, restaurants and city centres, medical facilities are now looking to benefit from on-site Wi-Fi access. "Now, everyone expects to be connected all the time," said Jacobsz, "so medical staff and patients are starting to demand the convenience and productivity benefits of Wi-Fi access in hospitals too."

Not only does Wi-Fi access give health care professionals real-time mobile access to collaboration tools, patient records, test results and other vital information while doing their rounds, it has also been found that patients who are able to stay in touch with loved ones via social media tend to fare better and recover faster than those who don't*. This is particularly important for older patients and patients undergoing long-term treatment.

High-profile patients

There is, however, a challenge in delivering Wi-Fi in hospitals, noted Jacobsz. Knowing the height of the sensitivity of the information that needs to be shared in a hospital environment, security of the Wi-Fi networks is of paramount importance. "In the case of high-profile patients, unencrypted data could be intercepted and sent to the media. We saw this in the news recently when medical information about Michael Schumacher was reportedly stolen through the Grenoble Hospital Wi-Fi network and offered for sale to media outlets. However, it is not only high-profile patients who could be targeted - any patient's personal information could be stolen and used by criminals unless it is shared in a highly secure manner."

Standard secure Wi-Fi technology is not enough, added Jacobsz, as patient and public access should ideally be kept separate from the environment used by medical professionals, and it should be done cost effectively with an emphasis on stability.

Aruba's Mobility solution, recently rolled out at one of the largest private hospital groups in South Africa, allows hospital staff and patients to benefit from connectivity within a highly secure system designed for medical facilities. Keeping visitor traffic completely separate from the highly secure and encrypted Medical Staff traffic, the solution delivers push message notification and social media tools for hospital marketing messages. Furthermore, by using the Aruba Airwave Management platform for monitoring and diagnostics, administration can even pinpoint the exact location of visitors.

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