Case Study: Hennepin County Medical Center

Location: Minneapolis, MN
Medical Center Type: urban
Personnel/Staff: 6,300+
Licensed Beds: 894
Average Daily Census: 331
Annual Clinic Visits: 537,467
Medical Center Size: spread across 5 city blocks
Number of Buildings: main campus, 7 neighborhood clinics, plus a clinic in the Hennepin County Government Center

Challenge

Hennepin County Medical Center (HCMC), a nationally recognized multi-site healthcare system, operates the largest emergency department in Minnesota. Located in the heart of downtown Minneapolis, the main campus is spread across five city blocks, which makes emergency communication a crucial element in the medical center's day-to-day operations. "We've been talking for quite some time about our alert system," says Jason Sufka, HCMC security operations supervisor, regarding the hospital's proactive efforts to research and implement a comprehensive emergency notification system.

Emergency alerting; however, is not a new concept for HCMC. The medical center has used a number of paging systems in the past but more recently decided to move forward with a system that extends beyond simple page, email, and phone alerts. "One of the first times we recognized that it was a major issue was during the 35W bridge collapse," says Sufka. "We found that from the start of the page system to the end of the page system took an obscene amount of time—around 20 minutes to get all of the messages out."

The 35W bridge collapse, a major story nationwide, required quick response and action from all hospitals in the area, including HCMC, a Level-I trauma center. Immediately following the event, HCMC sent out an emergency page notifying all hospital staff that a disaster outside of the hospital had occurred resulting in multiple casualties. "The alert told our staff to report to the hospital so we could manage the patients we thought we might get," says Sufka.

Following the event, it was discovered that some hospital staff never received that message. Many hospital employees only knew to report to the medical center once local news media started reporting that all hospitals were requiring staff to report to their hospitals immediately. The bridge collapse therefore served as one of many reasons that led HCMC to implement the Alertus solution and establish a comprehensive emergency notification system beyond its antiquated paging system.

"One of the things we started talking about was 'how are we going to notify everybody?'" says Sufka. "In the end we settled on the fact that the important piece that we were missing at HCMC was rapid notification to people who are physically on-site at the hospital, including patients, visitors, and employees." HCMC is unique in that it has more than 6,300 staff working in multiple medical cites across the city and in a variety of neighborhoods. "We ended up selecting the Alertus Desktop Notification because it's the best way to reach all of our employees in a rapid manner and then have a logged

response when people acknowledged the alert," says Sufka. The computer desktop alerting is also impossible to miss with the capability to display a full-screen desktop alert. The medical center is also exploring Alertus' USB panic button functionality, which would allow authorized dispatchers to activate an emergency alert.

In addition to Alertus Desktop Notification, HCMC also purchased several Alert Beacons and LED marquees to cover its main entry points into the facility. Sufka explains that these devices are beneficial when alerting the general public in the event of an emergency. "We also wanted to use it for our normal emergency pages like a tornado warning," says Sufka. "We could go ahead and broadcast that as an instant emergency page so everybody will know to stay away from windows and take shelter immediately."

Sufka goes on to explain that the Alert Beacons and LED marquees are especially beneficial in the event of inclement weather. "In Minnesota it's no secret that we get a lot of snow." The devices can be set up to activate a non-emergency page that displays a scrolling message with no flashing lights or sound. This has the benefit of sharing a general announcement or conveying caution and making people aware of events such as severe weather watches.

The next phase for HCMC is an organization-wide rollout. Zone- or area-specific alerting is especially beneficial for large organizations like HCMC, says Sufka. "For example, an alert that has no pertaining information to our off-site clinics, then there's no reason that the clinic needs to know about it. But if there's a disaster alert that needs to go out to all clinics, then we would send it that way."

HCMC, like many organizations, faces unique challenges when it comes to emergency alerting. And it's clear the medical center is up to the challenge as it continues to serve as a model for how an organization can quickly and effectively reach thousands of staff, patients, and visitors in the event of an emergency.

Alertus Technologies

Alertus Technologies® leads the industry in unified facility notification. For more than a decade, Alertus has engineered innovative emergency alert systems for colleges and universities, K–12 schools, corporations, medical centers, military bases, and government organizations—some of our customers include Virginia Commonwealth University, Boston University Medical Campus, and the US Department of Defense. The Alertus system is a customizable array of emergency notification products, including the wall-mounted Alert Beacon®, computer desktop alerting, USB panic button, LED marquee display, text-to-speech interface for public address and giant outdoor speaker systems, fire alarm interface, VoIP phone alerting, and digital signage and cable television override.

Hennepin County Medical Center

Hennepin County Medical Center is a nationally recognized Level I Adult Trauma Center and Level 1 Pediatric Trauma Center with the largest emergency department in Minnesota. It is operated by Hennepin Healthcare System, Inc., a subsidiary corporation of Hennepin County. The comprehensive academic medical center and public teaching hospital and clinic system includes a 455-bed acute care hospital and primary care and specialty clinics located in downtown Minneapolis and St. Anthony, Brooklyn Center,

Brooklyn Park, Golden Valley, and Richfield; and in Minneapolis in the Whittier Neighborhood and on East Lake Street. HCMC also has an employer-based clinic in the Hennepin County Government Center.