

Mount Kisco Medical Group, PC



When does an IT director not want people to know what his systems are doing? When his goal is transparency of operations.

For Joe Abate, director of information technology for Mount Kisco Medical Group (MKMG), transparency of the company's data and voice network is what he strives to deliver every day. "I don't want people to realize anything is going on. It is all about making it seamless to the end user, so that anything captured in one system flows seamlessly to other systems," he said.

A multi-specialty medical group, MKMG provides the highest quality medical care to more than 250,000 patients in 21 different locations throughout Westchester, Putnam and Dutchess counties in New York. Founded in 1946, MKMG has grown to more than 200 board-certified physicians representing almost 40 different medical specialties with offices in Mount Kisco, Katonah, Carmel and Poughkeepsie. The group is also an independent clinical affiliate of the internationally recognized Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston.

MKMG is a leader in implementing technology in healthcare. Its "one-stop shopping" approach to healthcare benefits from this leadership position. Clinicians get radiology and lab results to patients faster because those services are in house and the networks are in place to share the results. The group was also an early adopter of electronic medical records (EMR), so once someone is an MKMG patient, records can be shared across specialties as needed. A new EMR system will have additional features to improve communications, such as secure email between patients and nurses. Exam rooms are equipped with data entry capabilities so physicians and other clinicians can enter patient information and orders immediately into the EMR system.

The group also exchanges patient information with local hospitals when their patients are admitted or are having tests. In addition, 40 per cent of all electronic prescription ordering in New York comes from MKMG practitioners.

Customer

Mount Kisco Medical Group

Industry

Healthcare

Challenges

- Fast paced, growing company
- Choosing the right technologies
- Safety of patient information
- Lean, entrepreneurial environment

Solution

- True partnership with NEC
- High levels of planning and testing to ensure success
- Whatever it takes mindset

Results

- Reliable and redundant IT foundation
- Operational transparency
- Ability to provide highest quality healthcare
- A positive patient experience

Challenges

Abate is responsible for IT infrastructure, applications and telecommunications for MKMG. This includes all back end and main business systems, like medical records, ordering, scheduling, HR systems and the IT aspects of radiology and lab services. Integration of these systems is at the heart of his transparency goal.

“We have been working for years building the infrastructure. It is a never ending battle keeping up, so we are always looking at new technologies. We don’t like to be on the bleeding edge of technology, just the cutting edge where it has been through the wringer once. Then we are ready to jump on it.

“What we are about is the safety of patient information. When you get into the bleeding edge, you really have to be sure you keep patient data safe. We never want to be in the spot where we have lost data,” he said.

Abate says MKMG’s philosophy is to also stay lean and entrepreneurial by keeping costs and staff low. That adds to the challenge of maintaining IT operations at a high level.

Being a technology leader takes a lot of planning, testing and knowledge of technology, products and features. Abate said it is important to pre-plan and figure out how new technology or equipment is going to affect the operation of the organization. “We are very operations focused. For example, we get about 10,000 calls a day and the phones have to be up and running all the time, even after hours through answering services. We have to plan carefully and be sure new technology has been thoroughly tested, so cutovers go smoothly. I can’t afford downtime whatsoever.”

Solution

Abate counts on NEC, one of his technology partners, throughout his entire process – design, integration, testing and implementation. He has worked with NEC on IT, networking and telecommunications needs for 10 years.

Jeff Williams, NEC enterprise account manager for MKMG, said, “When we first started working with MKMG the discussions were voice centric, but early on Joe recognized the convergence of MKMG’s networks was going to be important. We have helped them create a single, triple-redundant network to carry all of their traffic, whether it pertains to patient care, medical records or practice communications. Everything we have ever done with Joe and his team supports that network and their goals for serving patients. We trust each other and have each other’s back.”

Abate said, “I’ve been in partnership with NEC the whole way. Jeff is interested in the success of my company. It is a two-way street. The better we do, the better NEC does. We figure out what really needs to get done, which isn’t usually the first answer. You have to really dig deep down to get the right answer, not just for today but for the long term. I push them hard and they push me hard back. They ask, ‘Are you sure you want to do this? It might be the more expensive way and we need to look at all the ways to do it to be sure we come up with the best solution.’”

Abate also trusts NEC not to push technology or an agenda. If a problem develops, Abate said NEC will do whatever it takes to correct the issue. “They have that extra over-the-top attitude when you have to figure out a way around a problem. It is all about doing whatever it takes. NEC has embraced us as a client and we are not allowed to fail on anything,” he said.

To keep the channels of communications open, Abate and Williams talk twice a week and hold a monthly strategic planning meeting with IT, operations and engineering experts from both companies. “We actually design the network together. We review current projects to keep them on track and identify risks. We also talk about short-term future projects, long-term strategic needs and service issues. All the people delivering the solutions are in the room. That way Joe gets the information directly from the right people,” Williams said.

He added that Abate is very open about future plans, which gives Williams and his team the luxury to thoroughly consider what technologies will work best. He said, “There are few surprises when you can more accurately plan what you are going to propose, Joe wants service and at a reasonable cost. Before I propose anything, I check our price online against three competitors. When he gets a proposal from us, he knows he is getting the best price.”

Abate believes working with NEC directly is best for his high level of research, planning and testing needs, because NEC supports its own products, can provide answers right away, and brings the right resources to the table. “We have never had an unsuccessful project, which is pretty nice to say for 10 years.”

MKMG’s new data center, which is about 8 miles away from the first two data centers, is a good example of the collaborative process he has developed with NEC. Abate is using dark fiber technology for the first time so all three data centers work as one. “We talked through all options in ridiculous detail with the NEC team. NEC brought all the necessary resources to the table. I laid down my requirements and said ‘I need this data center to be as if it was next door.’ We went back and forth and had meeting after meeting with the network design team and talked with the carrier to ensure everything worked together. I got the proposal and quote but decided it wasn’t good enough. So, we went back to the drawing board and figured out a better way. The final solution is very cost effective and easy to support,” he said.

Results

“Joe is focused on supporting MKMG’s high-quality patient care model, not the nuts and bolts of technology. He wants the technology in place so MKMG employees can give the best patient care possible,” Williams explained.

Abate compares making IT work to flicking on a light switch. People have confidence the lights will go on. He said, “I do not want people to see anything from a networking viewpoint. The network should work. Employees don’t care how much goes into making it work. I am looking for transparency.”

And, he is pretty close to reaching his transparency goal. He is confident 99% of MKMG employees never know when the company switches to new technologies, such as their new VOIP phone system or new voice mail system.

What MKMG’s employees do know is they can count on the highest level of security for patient information; they have 24/7 enhanced communications capabilities; and all clinical and back office applications work in tandem to serve patients.

“You build this trust by having a reliable IT foundation. When you have a problem installation, it eventually shows itself. We have built a strong foundation layer upon layer as we have grown. I owe a lot of that to NEC’s interactions with us. NEC has been a huge part of our success,” he said.

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