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*VoIP and
Hosted PBX in
The Healthcare
Sector*



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Organizations in the healthcare sector face a particular challenge in stretching their already strained budgets to include a communications system versatile enough to enable real or near real-time contact with patients, consultants, and sources of critical supplies - while also supporting monitoring and data management requirements that may be of immense volume and complexity.

Cloud-based telecommunications in the form of hosted PBX services and Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) telephony can go a long way towards resolving this dilemma, for cash-starved healthcare facilities at all levels.

Remote Consultation

For patients who are too unwell to move, motion impaired, lacking available transport, or simply located in areas too remote for a visit to the nearest healthcare facility to be practical, the ability to have consultations or receive prescriptions and therapy from medical staff via digital means can be a life-saver.

Hosted PBX and VoIP telephony platforms make this possible, with the enhancement of voice communications through video chat and conferencing, configurable alerts (to remind patients to take their prescribed medication, for example), and other real-time and scheduled features.

Presence & Mobility

Cloud telephony systems typically come with an associated set of mobile applications, to allow users to connect to their office telecommunications network from mobile devices like smartphones, tablets, and laptops, or using USB headsets and software ("softphones") on desktop computer systems.

These apps enable medical professionals to have access to their patients and their centers of operations from any location, and at any time of day. This extends the functionality of their VoIP or hosted PBX platforms not only to doctors and nursing staff, but also to those involved in paramedical and Emergency Response services like ambulance crews and firefighters.

Features like presence panels enable administrators and dispatchers to monitor the status and availability of their team members, and for the medical staff themselves to co-ordinate duties with their colleagues based on their displayed status ("On Call", "Do Not Disturb", "In Transit", etc.). And features like "Find Me/Follow Me" enable calls and messages to be routed to medical workers on their nearest convenient device.

Call Handling

Ensuring round the clock availability to patients and stakeholders effectively transforms the function of a health facility's reception service to that of a call center, with the need to field high volumes of calls, many simultaneous callers, specific and critical demands for particular calls, or a combination of these conditions.

VoIP and hosted or IP PBX solutions give healthcare organizations the contact center capabilities necessary for processing multiple calls at the same time, and hundreds of calls every day.

Account Processing

The monitoring and record-keeping facilities of VoIP-powered telecommunications systems make it easier for healthcare administrators to manage patient registers and account information. Reminders and bills can be sent out automatically, while patients can even settle their accounts over the phone.

Interactive Voice Response (IVR)

Interactive Voice Response or IVR technology makes it possible for users on both the service and consumer side of the healthcare equation to easily find the information and resources that they're looking for. With a hosted PBX system, IVR may be supported on multiple levels, with settings for each level configured via a simple web-based console.

Medical staff can use IVR to prioritize certain services or patient profiles, and to verify their scheduled appointments and the current status of specific patient reports.

Patients can use the technology to find information on specific healthcare facilities, the availability of specialists and nursing staff, or the current state of their own doctor's report.

Video Conferencing & Consultation

The multimedia data-handling capabilities of VoIP allow video conferencing applications to be fully integrated into hospital and healthcare facility telecommunications systems. These tools may be used for hosting appointments and check-ups with remote patients, mentoring and collaboration on surgical procedures, the dissemination of healthcare advice to patients via on-site monitors or their mobile devices, and numerous other applications.

Information Dissemination & Alerts

Beyond video, the unified messaging facilities of a hosted PBX or VoIP platform may include email, Instant Messaging, SMS text messaging, live chat, and integration with on-premises hardware like buzzers, alarms, and public address systems. These may all be used for broadcasting reminders, alerts, and emergency condition warnings in real time.

Unified Communications & Administration

The integration of voice, other data types, and multimedia capabilities result in an environment producing what's known as Unified Communications, or UC.

For facility staff and administrators, this allows information from various streams (the telephone system, office productivity applications, accounts, Customer Relationship Management, Enterprise Resource Planning software etc.) to be co-ordinated and managed from a single platform.

Unified Communications & Patient-Centric Care

As in so many other sectors, the current trend in healthcare is consumer-centric, with the consumers in this case being patients, their sponsors, and other stakeholders. VoIP and hosted PBX enable a multi-channel approach to keeping patients in touch and up to date with their vital contacts in a healthcare facility, with call-handling and messaging efficiency that keep waiting times minimized, and waiting lines as short as possible.

Support services and feedback in the form of the rapid delivery of test results, billing support, and customer satisfaction surveys all help in maintaining the necessary focus on the patients and their well-being.

Availability & Business Continuity

Assuring the safety and confidentiality of sensitive health data is only part of the story. Healthcare facilities also need to remain available to their stakeholders on a permanent basis. The virtual numbering and call routing capabilities of VoIP ensure that facility staff can be contacted at any location or time of day.

Hosted PBX providers with mature cloud networks can further ensure availability by having "failover" options, in the event of a natural or human-made incident that results in the loss of local network connectivity. These may include the automatic transfer of calls to designated mobile phones, and the provision of connections to alternate sites to reduce or eliminate downtime and delays in data transfer.

Saving Money

Finally, the use of VoIP and hosted PBX has significant cost benefits for healthcare institutions. Hosted services eliminate the need for purchasing, managing, and maintaining on-premises PBX hardware - with the burden of management and infrastructure provision shifted to a service provider in the cloud.

And VoIP-based telephony offers considerable reductions in call tariffs, when compared to traditional telephone systems. Calls to numbers within the same VoIP network are typically free, while long-distance and international calls are routed over the internet, and generally attract local call rates.