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Top 5 healthcare trends

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Singapore: The healthcare industry is at a disruptive stage globally and patient's involvement and engagement in their own health is on the rise, urging healthcare organizations to reinforce and modernize their IT infrastructures.

Forbes recently highlighted that healthcare tech is an industry to watch in 2014 . In Asia Pacific, healthcare IT spending are predicted to grow by 8 percent CAGR by 2018. It is becoming imperative to improve not only the patient's, but also the caregiver's experience. Faster Wi-Fi, BYOD, wireless medical devices are all on people's minds and there is an increasing demand for hospital network's performance to evolve in order to face this trend.

While the politics and business models of healthcare services differ greatly from one country to another, the trends impacting IT operations do not. Here are some of the top trends that will shape the future of healthcare.

1. Patient Safety

Projects around increased patient safety tend to receive a significant amount of attention. Network infrastructure, wireless networking, wired switches may not seem very glamorous or at the forefront of patient safety initiatives, yet they provide the critical foundation. Solutions such as real-time location services or mobile patient telemetry systems are increasingly leveraging the hospital Wi-Fi network. Technology must therefore, be seen as part of the team of carers that contribute to patient care. The advantage of this team member is it obeys a rigid set of instructions and behaves consistently. For instance,

electronic prescribing has been shown to make prescription errors 50 percent less likely compared to handwritten ones .

2. Patient Satisfaction

Improving a patient's experience is always on most organizations' radar but the question becomes what can we do about it? A top driver seen most, is the expectation of delivering a high quality guest Wi-Fi experience. Many hospitals report that most of associated devices on the WLAN are on the guest network. For a patient in a hospital streaming a movie is just as important as any business application running on the network. Therefore, there is a need to provide patients with a robust Wi-Fi network that can support video streaming. What used to be a nice surprise has become an expectation. This requires the necessary adaptations from the hospitals. Another means is with the pervasive use of patient bedside terminals for Internet access, television, and other entertainment options. The patients do not care how the network is balancing clinical operations usage with guests. It is up to IT to ensure the needs of both user groups are met and acceptable results are delivered.

3. Clinician Satisfaction

BYOD is undoubtedly one of the major challenge for hospitals. There is a growing trend of using smartphones in clinical care and those devices may or may not be owned by hospitals. Clinicians assume 802.11 offers a guarantee for connectivity but the challenges for IT support are more complex than that. Smartphones are not designed for optimized VoWiFi but for data offloading. However, managing expectations with the clinical community is critical for any mobile device program.

Another key driver in clinician satisfaction is how to improve workflow. If you ever follow clinicians around a hospital, you will see that time spent logging into or out of applications and devices is a major source of frustration. Mobile devices and virtualized desktop solutions are fast becoming the norm for clinical access to Electronic Medical Records (EMR) systems. Enhanced networking capabilities around virtualization support and expanded WLANs are the foundation for enabling these systems.

4. Increasing Revenue and Decreasing Costs

While business operations is focused, it still falls to support initiatives around cost savings or revenue generation. Who hasn't been asked to do more with less? One way we have strived to help support these efforts at Extreme Networks is with a robust management platform to reduce the amount of time and effort spent in management of the wired and wireless infrastructure. Clinical patient care has changed significantly over the last decade and there is a need for IT support to evolve as well.

5. Government Requirements

Every country has regulations that for better or worse drive hospital behavior. Moving from paper based processes to electronic systems has brought significant investment in upgrading infrastructure. Compliance around access controls, medical devices, and BYOD have brought renewed interested in capabilities around network access controls, policy management, and reporting capabilities.

The most effective IT teams are the ones that spend time meeting with their clinical customers and understanding the needs and drivers of the organization. Complex regulatory concerns and patient-care priorities can affect the speed with which technology can be adopted and implemented in the healthcare industry. However, the introduction of practical new technology tools - powered by the cloud and enabled by the ubiquity of smart mobile devices and online storage - is upping the ante and accelerating the pace.

The network has become an intrinsic and essential component of the IT infrastructure. Almost all enterprise applications and, thus, business processes are supported by the enterprise network . It is up to us, networking companies, to raise awareness on the criticality of the data networks use today in healthcare organizations. By staying abreast of trends and leading the discussions on how to help organizations address them, we effectively contribute to foster innovation in healthcare.