



Cherokee Regional Medical Center

Enabling safe and efficient communication

Organization Overview

Cherokee Regional Medical Center (CRMC) serves residents of Cherokee County, Iowa and the surrounding counties. It serves the community through a Critical Access Hospital, four regional clinics, senior housing, hospice, home health, public health, and wellness services. CRMC continues to reexamine and renew itself in order to remain timely and true to its mission of providing quality healthcare services to the area.

Challenges

- Provide staff with a unified communication solution
- Replace walkie-talkies and overhead paging
- Improve communication in isolation environments and under PPE

Vocera Solution

- Vocera Minibadge
- Vocera mobile application

Results*

- Helps enable efficient communication without concern of contamination
- Helps staff feel and stay safe in potentially aggressive situations
- Helps ease the burden on staff and ensure patients get the care they need, when and where they need it

Challenges

Care team members at Cherokee Regional Medical Center (CRMC), located in Iowa relied primarily on walkie-talkies and overhead paging to communicate across the organization's Critical Access Hospital.

"We needed to provide our staff with a better, more comprehensive communication solution," explained Jodi Johnson, RN, Education Manager at CRMC. "Walkie-talkies weren't cutting it because they don't allow staff to securely communicate with others outside of their department, they have limited channels, and they require hands-on operation. We struggled to communicate efficiently and reach the people we needed when we needed them. Our lack of a cohesive communication method and dependency on overhead paging was also contributing to communication fatigue."

COVID-19 hit when CRMC leaders were evaluating clinical communication and collaboration platforms to help unify staff communication. The pandemic underscored the need for a solution that would help clinicians communicate without risking contamination.

Vocera Solution

CRMC secured CARES Act funding to purchase Vocera technology including the Vocera mobile app and Vocera Minibadge, a lightweight, wearable communication device with a voice-centric interface that enables hands-free operation. Staff can communicate efficiently and safely, even under personal protective equipment (PPE), which made Vocera technology stand out as the right solution for CRMC.

Once implemented, the Minibadge quickly proved to be a value add for several departments, including pharmacy, surgery and emergency (ED).

Prior to mixing valuable chemotherapy drugs, CRMC pharmacy staff need to communicate with the care team of the patient receiving chemotherapy to confirm the patient's vital signs are stable enough to receive the medication. Using simple voice commands, a member of pharmacy staff can say, "OK Vocera" to wake the Minibadge and then say, "Call oncology nurse" to connect with the patient's nurse and ensure they can begin mixing the medication.

"Our pharmacy staff working in the chemotherapy mixing room wear the Vocera Minibadge under their full PPE because it's a sterile environment, and they need a completely hands-free way to communicate with staff in other areas of the hospital," explained Johnson.

Members of the CRMC surgery team wear the Minibadge to communicate with staff outside of surgery so they can ask for assistance or supplies without having to leave the room. Additionally, the hands-free device is used to facilitate ED staff communication in a hands-on care environment, while also helping them feel safer. The device has a dedicated panic button for a fast and discrete way to summon help in a crisis.

"Ensuring that staff feel and stay safe at work is a key priority for us," said Johnson. "Our ED staff wear the Vocera Minibadge to help them stay connected to the rest of the team."

While the Minibadge is used by CRMC staff who need a way to communicate hands-free, the Vocera mobile app is primarily used by leadership and physicians, who use the secure app on their personal smartphones.

“Our goal was to introduce a solution that could unify communication for the entire care team, including physicians,” said Johnson. “Vocera technology is helping us streamline communication. It makes it easy and secure for a physician to directly communicate with the nurses caring for our patients.”

The Vocera app is also used as the primary means of communication in CRMC’s telehealth hospitalist program. The remote hospitalists work overnight in CRMC’s inpatient unit, managing the admission, evaluation and monitoring of patients. They communicate with the patient via webcam and use the Vocera app to securely communicate patient information with onsite staff.

“When it’s time to hand the patient off to the onsite provider in the morning, the Vocera mobile app makes it easy to securely communicate patient information to members of the care team working in the hospital,” explained Johnson.

Results*

Since implementing its Vocera solution, clinical and ancillary staff at CRMC are able to stay connected regardless of where they are working on campus.

The hands-free communication enabled by the Minibadge has helped pharmacy and surgery staff communicate safely and effectively without concern of contamination.

“The Vocera Minibadge helps staff communicate and confirm that a patient is ready to receive chemotherapy,” said Johnson. “Having this method of communication for our pharmacy team helps ensure we don’t waste valuable medication or time.”

“Surgery staff don’t want to risk contamination for communication when they are scrubbed in,” Johnson explained. “The Vocera Minibadge gives our surgery department a way to communicate with staff in other areas of the hospital using only their voice.”

Providing ED staff with a communication solution that also helps them feel safe them has been another value add for the organization.

“The ED can be a place where staff are faced with potentially aggressive situations,” said Johnson. “Arming staff with the Vocera Minibadge helps keep them safe because they can use the panic button to quickly summon help if they ever feel threatened.”

CRMC’s telehealth hospitalist program has helped ease the burden on staff and ensure patients get the care they need, when and where they need it.

“Overnight patients get to see a provider on a screen who hasn’t just been woken up from slumber, which has helped improve patient experience, care and safety,” explained Johnson. “Because our remote and onsite hospitalists can communicate about patients securely using the Vocera app, patient handoffs have been a breeze.”

“I really advocated to implement Vocera solutions and truly believe we have provided our staff the tools needed to get the right members at the bedside,” said Johnson. “We no longer have to overhead page, shout or wander around to find the right person when we need them which has boosted staff resiliency, safety and has helped us be more efficient.”

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For More Information

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