

Pediatrician’s Phone System Enhances Patient Care and Staff Productivity

Sheffield Pediatrics relies on Cisco Unified Communications to maintain contact, prioritize cases, and optimize staff efficiency.

Executive Summary
<p>SHEFFIELD PEDIATRICS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Healthcare • Memphis, Tennessee, USA • One physician, three fulltime, one part-time employee
<p>BUSINESS CHALLENGE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New one-physician office starting with a clean slate needed to maximize patient care, efficiency, and paperless patient record keeping
<p>NETWORK SOLUTION</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cisco Smart Business Communications System • Simplifies patient and staff communications and minimizes overhead • Unified Communications Solution simplifies patient and staff communications and minimizes overhead
<p>BUSINESS RESULTS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practice able to eliminate after-hours service and streamline staffing needs by 12.5 percent • Complete paperless system including secure access to Electronic Medical Records • Direct access to physician through communications system allows for more efficient triage and patient peace-of-mind

Business Challenge

Dr. Nicole Sheffield was opening her own, private pediatric practice in Memphis, Tennessee in 2007 after several years as an employee in a multiphysician office. She knew that she wanted to avoid some of what she endured in her old work situation: unreliable telephone access, inconvenient record retrieval, hit-and-miss access to patient information, staff telephoning back and forth without connecting, and patient frustration with having to repeat information due to a weak communications and record maintenance system.

“Opening a brand new office is an opportunity to do things the way that you want to do them without compromise,” she says. “One of the things that I wanted to do was maximize communications technology so my patients could receive the very best attention from me and from my staff.” Dr. Sheffield wanted to help ensure that her staff could efficiently communicate with patients and with each other, including Electronic Medical Records (EMR) at every point-of-care. Further, she wanted a system that would allow her to efficiently evaluate cases that came in over the phone and prioritize them appropriately.

“The best thing I did was go to a networking professional like Mark Giannini at Service Assurance,” Dr. Sheffield says. “Mark and his team did a great job covering all the bases once I explained to them what my dream telecommunications setup would be. It sounds like a cliché, but Service Assurance really did make all my dreams come true.”

As a new practice, Sheffield Pediatrics had to take business development and overhead into account. “I didn’t want there to be any frustration for those trying to make appointments, and of course I wanted to minimize costs and help my staff be as productive as possible.

“Patients today are demanding smaller offices and more personalized care,” she says. “To meet this demand, we need to be as efficient as possible in all phases of the practice. It is easier to buy one unified communications system than four or five pieces to get what we need.”

Network Solution

One of Dr. Sheffield's first steps was to hire Giannini, a technology consultant with Service Assurance, a Cisco Premiere full service solution provider specializing in the support of Clinical Health Care Practices, who steered her towards a Cisco® Unified Communications solution. "Dr. Sheffield needed a complete network solution to handle all of her communications needs, including an internal phone system, and secure internet access to protect her electronic medical records," says Giannini. "The Cisco Unified Communications 500 Series with Integrated Wireless Access Point, Cisco Unified IP Phone 7941G, and the Cisco Unified IP Phone 7961G, met all those needs. It was the most efficient solution."

The Cisco Unified Communications 500 Series, part of Cisco's Smart Business Communication System, is targeted at small offices of 50 or fewer users. It is a full-featured IP-based phone system designed for rapid deployment and simplified management. Contained in a single appliance, the Cisco Unified Communications 500 series boasts a full infrastructure in a box. It is a Unified Communications Solution that provides voice communications, data communications, voicemail, Automated Attendant, video, security, and wireless capabilities while integrating with existing desktop applications. The configuration and packaging simplify installation while still providing the back-end components required to help ensure a secure, high-quality, voice and data network. "Opening a new office meant that I was starting with a clean slate," says Dr. Sheffield. "Cisco was a logical choice."

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— Nicole Sheffield, M.D., Sheffield Pediatrics

Dr. Sheffield's staff has headsets on in the office, and therefore never misses a call, which eliminates missed telephone connections between them and patient frustration in trying to make appointments. It is also easier for Dr. Sheffield to receive referrals from other physicians and medical centers. "This has been a very good, all-inclusive solution for us," she says. "The support it provides is like having another staff member without the HR issues." The EMR element of her solution is supported by the Cisco Unified Communications 500 Series and proprietary software developed by Allscripts, a Cisco Solution partner.

With the help of Service Assurance, a trusted technology advisor to physicians whose depth of staff and flexibility help get solutions implemented quickly, Sheffield Pediatrics was able to get its system installed and operating in one week.

Business Results

Dr. Sheffield was accustomed to an after-hours answering service as part of her old office. With the Cisco Unified Communications 500 Series in place, that was no longer necessary. "With the new system, I was able to retrieve patient calls myself and hear directly from them what the problem was," she says. "This eliminated the need for an intermediary, and I was able to save US\$600 almost immediately." Dr. Sheffield also said that hearing directly

from patients meant that she was able to evaluate cases more effectively and appropriately react to the severity. "I have a patient with sickle-cell anemia who had a problem after hours," she says. "In this case I was able to hear directly from the mother on our after-hours voicemail system and respond to her within ten minutes. The child was able to get the appropriate care quickly, and we eliminated a lot of wasted time and worry."

Product List

- Cisco Unified 500 Series with Integrated Wireless Access Point
- Cisco Unified IP Phone 7941G
- Cisco Unified IP Phone 7961G

Her Cisco solution along with Allscripts MyWay also helped Dr. Sheffield staff appropriately. "I was able to take a position that I had planned on as full-time and turn it into a part-time role," she says. "That means a US\$12,000 annual savings for the practice." Dr. Sheffield's current staff has complete freedom of movement as

a result of the communications system, which also maximizes efficiency and will likely lead to fewer staff additions as the practice grows.

The practice also saves time and effort with its Allscripts MyWay, which is supported by the Cisco Unified Communications 500 Series. Using its Cisco Unified Communications system to keep charts and records means that communication between Dr. Sheffield and her registered nurse is always clear; there are fewer questions, frustration is nearly eliminated, and both have more time and energy to take care of their patients. "There are just fewer unknowns," says Dr. Sheffield. "We can do our jobs better and more efficiently."

Having secure access to voice and wireless networking when and where she needs it allows Dr. Sheffield to communicate more effectively and efficiently with patients and staff. Cisco Unified Communications provides her with the right mix of communications, productivity, and business operations applications, designed to work together so they are easier to deploy, operate, and manage. It is even easier for Dr. Sheffield to take a vacation.

"I have three physicians who cover for me when I'm not on call or on vacation," she says. "The versatility of my Cisco system allows me to listen to my patient calls when I'm out of the office and help direct care when necessary. This means that I can better relax when I'm gone, knowing that my patients have my input when they need it, and enjoy myself more." As a result, Dr. Sheffield says, she doesn't have a huge backlog of messages when she returns, and she actually feels refreshed from her time away.

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