

N.Y. Health System Turns Ambulances Into Wireless Hotspots



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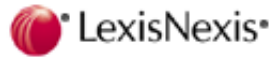
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Ambulances aren't

the only things accelerating these days - so are their communications systems.



Relegating a reliance on radios to the past, the North Shore-Long Island Jewish Health System has turned its ambulances into wireless hotspots, allowing them to transfer data and be more efficient.

The Great Neck-based provider deployed equipment developed by Vancouver, Canada-based In Motion Technology in its 54 ambulances, one of the nation's larger hospital-based fleets.

The technology was tested for about six months before being going live a few weeks ago, according to the system. It replaces what the system described as overloaded radio networks for voice and data.

North Shore-LIJ said it cost only several thousand dollars per ambulance for what amounts to an emergency care revolution, allowing more rapid and complicated communication, crucial in situations where seconds matter.

"This will increase our operating efficiency on a scale we couldn't imagine," said Alan Schwalberg, the system's vice president of emergency medical services. "When you use multiple platforms, wireless and radio, it's less efficient than being on one platform. "

Schwalberg said the system will use the technology to more smoothly manage the transportation and ambulance care of 60,000 people annually.

"With this type of volume, we have tremendous logistic, technological and communications demands," Schwalberg said.

North Shore-LIJ is using In Motion's onBoard Mobile Gateway to turn each ambulance into what the system described as a "high-performance, rolling hotspot. "

Staff can tap into wireless networks securely with laptops, PDAs and other devices in and around ambulances.

"The system works all over," Schwalberg said. "It has the ability to use all different types of wireless services. We're pleased with the ability to communicate quickly with the information we need. "

He said North Shore-LIJ can more rapidly determine vehicle location and status, use global positioning and transmit medical data such as EKG results, staying connected to emergency departments.

North Shore-LIJ plans to use the technology to test iPads that could be used to communicate stroke victim information to neurologists and emergency department doctors. In stroke care even more than in most other situations, speed is

crucial in effective treatment.

North Shore-LIJ also is looking into whether the technology can help streamline operations and enhance training as well as reducing response time and improving care.

"Everything is encrypted," Schwalberg said regarding privacy issues. "The transmissions are all secured. "

But this doesn't mean North Shore-LIJ is getting rid of its radios just yet. The system at least temporarily plans to retain radio equipment as a backup, although it may entirely cut the cord with that technology.

"As we go forward," Schwalberg said, "we'll determine if we're going to maintain that. "

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