

GUNDERSEN LUTHERAN HEALTH SYSTEM



THE CHALLENGE

Gundersen Lutheran Health System is comprised of the nation's largest multi-specialty group medical practices, regional community clinics, hospitals, nursing homes, home care, behavioral health services, vision centers, pharmacies, and air and ground ambulances. It is no small feat to protect its more than 500 medical, dental, and associate staff, as well as a support staff of more than 5,000 who serve 19 counties in an emergency.

"Communication is the number one requirement for successfully coping with any disaster," explains Janet Olmstead, Gundersen's telecommunications manager. "That's why we wanted an automated emergency notification system to manage and respond to emergencies as efficiently as possible. "If we can coordinate efforts and get information out in a timely fashion, we can save lives and money."

With employees located throughout western Wisconsin, northeastern Iowa, and southeastern Minnesota, Gundersen needed a flexible, automated emergency notification system to expedite notification of and response by appropriate Gundersen medical and administrative staff.



"Inability to monitor which medical providers actually pick up a page and limited information about where to go, the type of disaster, location, and process descriptions made after-hour emergency notification a nightmare," according to Olmstead. She adds that phone trees tended to distort messages to its 150 administrative people—from the CEO, to every department that plays a critical role in a disaster as well as their back-ups.

OVERVIEW

Gundersen Lutheran Health System is a comprehensive healthcare network serving a 19-county region in western Wisconsin, northeastern Iowa and southeastern Minnesota. It also serves as the designated Western Clinical Campus for the University of Wisconsin-Madison Medical School and School of Nursing. Realizing that in an emergency, where saving time equates to saving lives, Gundersen Lutheran implemented an emergency communication system to shave precious minutes off its response time and protect employee safety.

INDUSTRY

Healthcare

SOLUTION

Spok® e.Notify

THE OBJECTIVES

- Expedite emergency notification throughout Gundersen's 19-county region
- Ensure accurate strategic communication delivery that is documented, auditable and repeatable
- Ensure efficient response by appropriate Gundersen medical and administrative staff to any disaster for which more than 30 patients would be expected
- Meet readiness standards defined by The Joint Commission

CASE STUDY

THE SOLUTION

Gundersen's EMC chose Spok e.Notify for its features as well as its compatibility with Gundersen's telecommunications system. "Since we were already using [Spok's] automated operator system and web directory applications, we felt integration would be easier. For instance, our existing system's on-call scheduling feature allows [Spok] e.Notify to contact on-call staff immediately without the delay of having personnel research and input on-call staff at any given time."

"[Spok] e.Notify ensures accurate strategic communication delivery that is documented, auditable and repeatable. It accommodates emergency-related variables regarding who and how to notify, important information to relay to each party, and when and how often we communicate with each party," said Olmstead.

Any one up to two dozen people—including Gundersen's safety officer, EMC members, key communications personnel and officers of the day—can activate notifications, depending on the nature and location of the emergency. "A cross-section of geographically located personnel at various management levels can initiate the system, and we've developed policies and procedures for contacting response team leaders, the officer of the day, operators, and on-call services providers."

Spok e.Notify's ability to copy events made building contingencies into Gundersen's system easier. "Instead of re-inventing the wheel for each variation and scope of an emergency, with our system we can copy our full toxic-related emergency Code White system and adjust various options for a limited Code White. And Spok e.Notify automatically knows who to page using text or numerics."

In addition to Code White and weather-related Code Gray emergencies, Gundersen plans to use its emergency communication system to alleviate critical-care staffing shortages and communicate during equipment failures and outages. If the telephone system is down, Spok e.Notify will initiate text messaging.

THE ROLLOUT

Gundersen's EMC is initially focusing on implementation of Spok e.Notify for Code White toxic and trauma burn emergencies. Spok e.Notify simultaneously notifies appropriate personnel for each kind of Code White: pulmonary and neurology for toxic-related emergencies; and dermatology, orthopedics, and the OR for trauma burn emergencies.

Gundersen's plans call for non-employees, such as city officials, to be added to the system for effective coordination of services in handling catastrophic emergencies.

How it works:

- Multimodal activation and notification via telephone, pager, email or the web. Event monitoring confirms receipt of and response to notification.
- Off-site system activation ensures that the system is deployed for all types of emergencies—no matter when they occur.
- The ability to structure information about the emergency and related variables covers who and how to notify, important information to relay to each party, and when and how often to communicate with each party.
- The system will be used to alleviate critical-care staffing shortages and communicate during equipment failures and outages via text messaging and cell phones.

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Janet Olmstead
Telecommunications Manager