Mobile Clinical Communication Ecosystem Supports Asante's Award-Winning Patient Care

Strategic partnership with Halo Health and SMG3Rx helps Asante streamline workflows, standardize communication, and stay connected with the clinical community

A provider of comprehensive medical care to more than 600,000 people in Southern Oregon and Northern California, Medford, Oregon-based Asante has three hospitals and more than 30 locations. With the largest health system in a nine-county region, they have more than 5,800 employees and provide award-winning care. In 2019, Asante was named by Watson Health as one of the top 15 healthcare systems in the U.S. – an honor the organization has received for seven years in a row. The same year, their three hospitals had perfect five-star ratings from the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS).

Given Asante's dedication to patient care and clinician satisfaction, finding the right clinical communication solution was really important to its CIO and IT team. Leadership realized it would need a uniquely capable and flexible technology that meets the needs of healthcare providers at a fundamental level. What they needed was a mobile clinical communication ecosystem while taking a holistic and strategic approach to deploying the right network infrastructure, mobile devices, cloud-based software and integrations. This investment would need to meet their needs now and be able to scale and support future growth and acquisitions.

Unfortunately, several of the communication systems they researched lacked clinical relevance. Asante knew it would have to find a different option, which is what ultimately led the health system to Halo Health, Strategic Mobility Group (SMG3Rx), and Zebra Technologies.

Discovering a truly unified mobile platform

Asante's initial choice was not the right fit. In the transition from wireless IP devices and pagers, the health system piloted one vendor's specialized devices, but they were heavy, lacked important functionality, and clinicians needed a better option. Approximately three years later, the health system found a solution that worked best for its clinical teams.

"One of the challenges with our first vendor that we attempted to use was they operated like they were just delivering a device. They didn't see their job as helping to streamline the workflows and identify how it could work for us," said Michele Strickland, MBA, BSN, RN, Director of Informatics, Asante. "Whereas, Halo partnered with us and really asked what challenges we had, what problems we were trying to solve, and then helped tailor the platform to meet that."

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Strickland cited the need for a unified standard with expanded clinical functionality as the main impetus behind the decision to implement the Halo Clinical Collaboration Platform. Halo Health partnered with SMG3Rx to provide network upgrade services and Zebra mobile devices, which are built specifically for the healthcare market.

The need for real-time communication

Since the clinicians could only see messages when they were at their desktop computers, they lacked real-time access to time-sensitive information. Nurses in patient rooms, for example, would have to wait for physicians to call them on the phone or access messages when they returned to their computers. Clinicians who wanted to reach their colleagues needed to look up phone numbers manually. In an emergency situation, quick and efficient communication is particularly necessary. If Asante wanted to contact and mobilize an entire team rapidly, its previous means of communication could not effectively do so.

Staff communication was severely restricted, according to Strickland. "It was inconsistent and very time consuming," she recalled. "Providers would page the nurse's pager. And, we had inconsistent workflows and availability of these pagers. So not all units, not all nurses or clinical staff had pagers."

Asante now has 6,500 active Halo users who exchange an average of 1 million messages a month on 800+ Zebra TC51 smartphones deployed by SMG3Rx. Clinicians are communicating more than ever and are continually finding new uses for the Halo Platform.
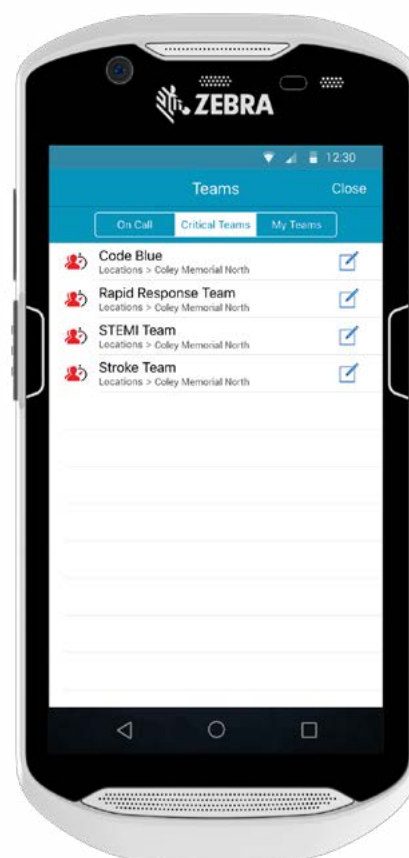
Improving collaboration across the clinician community

Implementing the new platform and working with Halo as a strategic partner has enabled the health system to pursue its mission of expanding connection and collaboration with the local community, where Asante has 80 percent of the healthcare market share, according to Lee David Milligan, MD, CHCIO, Asante. In support of local physicians, Asante is expanding their access to Halo.

"Instead of really complicated technology, I think the first priority is to make sure that we have built a framework for success moving forward," Milligan said. "I would say if you want to be successful in this space, you have to be a learning system. You have to learn from what you're doing and do it better tomorrow than you did yesterday."

Milligan sees Halo Health as a critical technology partner. In empowering Asante to continue setting the standard for award-winning care, he also believes that encouraging local practices' participation in Asante's Halo communication network is allowing the organization to uphold its responsibility to provide patient care anywhere and at any time.

According to Milligan, the communication process at Asante works as a hub-and-spoke system. On the inpatient side, the hospitalists are the hub and the specialists are the spokes.

On the ambulatory side, the primary care doctors are the hub and the specialists on the outpatient side are the spokes.

"It's really about communicating around patient care," said Milligan. "If a primary care doctor is concerned about a patient, they'll simply use Halo to identify who they're going to speak to, send a message, get some feedback back, and make a plan. After it's all said and done, frequently, the specialist will then get back in touch with the primary care doctor via Halo on a secure platform that I no longer have to worry about."

Strickland agreed. "We are trying to standardize how our staff clinically communicate with outside clinicians," she said. "When we develop or revise workflows, we provide clinical staff with the opportunity to learn about and start using the Halo Platform. We're also introducing physicians from the community to Halo so they can join our communication network."

Role-based messaging

Halo has already helped Asante to significantly improve workflows and reduce the time it takes to respond to emergency codes. "We use Halo now for our STEMIs and for our trauma activations," Milligan said. "The cardiologist, nursing staff, and everyone else who plays some role in getting that patient from the driveway in front of the ER to the cardiac cath lab is on a STEMI blast message through Halo. Instead of paging everyone, they can send specific messages such as, 'ETA two minutes.' It's beautiful."

Halo's native on-call scheduling functionality automates role-based messaging to ensure the right message and information gets to the right person, role or team – instantly. On-call scheduling is also what helps to accelerate team coordination and mobilization.

The Halo Platform has been deployed throughout the organization – even in the IT department. Milligan added, "On the IT front, I use it for my team. We actually resolve in excess of 70 percent of the problems we encounter via Halo.

"Now, the IT manager on call can hold a remote meeting with the rest of the team instead of gathering in-person or having to walk over to the data center to problem solve," he added. With Halo, Asante can tackle challenges that are otherwise much more difficult to solve remotely.

To drive Asante's high-quality standards and focus on providing timely and effective patient care, SMG3Rx implemented and deployed Zebra's TC51 software and service components to

establish a mobile clinical ecosystem to streamline critical clinical communication and team coordination.

Strickland appreciates the positive experience Asante's clinicians have with the Halo Platform and Zebra mobile devices deployed by SMG3Rx. By continuing to roll out the platform, they are streamlining and simplifying clinical workflows throughout the organization.

"Our nurses have enjoyed the added features and functions as we expand the Zebra device, to be able to use the camera and use the barcode scanner," Strickland said. "They're looking forward to the integration we're going to be rolling out this fall with Halo and our nurse call system and the ability to streamline workflows around communication. We are making this device work for the nurse rather than the nurse work for the device."

Start with the right foundation and partners

Strickland believes that organizations beginning to implement their own mobile clinical communication ecosystems need to be prepared and plan ahead. "First, understand what you need and what problems you're trying to solve. Know what your network support structure infrastructure is going to look like. Look at the network as the base platform," she advised. Sometimes, even minor changes to an existing network can be highly disruptive. "If you move things like a wall or a shelf, it changes your wireless," she added.

"The biggest network piece for us is we needed to move AirWatch or Workspace ONE from VMware to the cloud," explained Milligan. "Without moving them to the cloud, we weren't able to do the rest of the work that needed to happen, including the kitting of the devices."

SMG3 provided consulting services to Asante on how to build the correct VMware instance in order to build a stable mobile platform to support the device and user growth. SMG3Rx's mobile device kitting process included custom designing the master image to be applied to 800+ Zebra TC51 smartphones, staging, configuration, and deployment services.

"SMG3 was fantastic," said Milligan. "You can imagine, we're a health system, not an exclusive IT shop, so we need and depend on good partners to take the ball on specific responsibilities and do the entire thing. The team from SMG3 did that effectively. They communicated well, they kitted the devices for us, and so all we really had to do when they arrived was turn them on."

"We have had a terrific experience with these folks [Halo] and we really see them as a partner. I don't use the word 'partner' lightly – as you can imagine, we have hundreds and thousands of vendors that we work with and only a handful are truly partners. We weren't just a customer to them and they are really trying to understand our business and offer a better product," Milligan said.

With the right foundation, healthcare organizations can build a mobile clinical communication ecosystem that supports patient care instead of hindering it. Asante's work with Halo Health, SMG3Rx, and Zebra demonstrates the impact that having the right communication platform, devices, and network partners has on an entire health system.

The future technology focus for Asante Health is about automation

"I see mobility and telehealth as the two biggest drivers of change within healthcare over the next three to five years," indicated Milligan. Mobile platforms with effective and intuitive interfaces are enabling clinicians to get things done more quickly.

A large focus for Asante has been and will continue to be automation in order to improve efficiencies across the hospital. "I'm really trying to focus on how to make things automagical that should be automagical so that my team can be freed up to really work on things that absolutely need a human being in front of it to do," said Milligan.

Because of the strain the COVID-19 pandemic has put on IT budgets, the need to do more with the same is greater than ever. By improving workflows and automation, an organization can become more efficient. "If we really want to take great care of our patients, we've got to take great care of our providers and nurses. Leveraging technology to automate is one of the ways we can take great care of them," added Milligan.

To learn more about how SMGRx can help your organization streamline communications, visit www.SMG3Rx.com/Award-Winning-Patient-Care

About SMG3Rx
SMG3Rx is the industry leader in Clinical Smartphone Integration providing device selection, workflow design, support architecture, end-user experience and lifecycle management. Regardless of your Apps, SMG3Rx provides consultative professional services supporting our Healthcare Client's smartphones. We're dedicated to providing an innovative, cost-effective smartphone environment improving patient outcomes and caregiver interaction. Visit www.SMG3Rx.com for more information.

About Zebra Technologies
Zebra (NASDAQ: ZBRA) empowers the front line in retail/ecommerce, manufacturing, transportation and logistics, healthcare, public sector and other industries to achieve a performance edge. With more than 10,000 partners across 100 countries, Zebra delivers industry-tailored, end-to-end solutions to enable every asset and worker to be visible, connected and fully optimized.

About Halo Health
Halo Health provides the Halo Clinical Collaboration Platform with secure, role-based messaging and on-call scheduling. The Halo Platform is a comprehensive, cost-effective and scalable mobile solution for healthcare organizations. Halo Health is a strategic partner that helps customers streamline clinical communication and workflows to improve patient care.