

Innovations: Froedtert staff connects with new voice-activated devices

By Alysha Schertz



Saving Time: Nurses in one of Froedtert's 26-bed Medical Intensive Care Unit, Ellen Kozielek and Sue Hoefs, demonstrate how easy it is to use the voice activated technology of Vocera.

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Froedtert & Community Health has begun installing a more efficient means of communication within its hospital departments. The Vocera communication system consists of the Vocera system software that manages all call activity and the Vocera communications badge that each employee wears and can operate via voice-controlled communication over a wireless LAN.

"It really allows us to function more fluidly, and work more as a team," said Dr. Christopher Decker, medical director for Froedtert & the Medical College of Wisconsin's emergency department. "It is super convenient because we can be walking throughout the floor and still have access to pretty much any individual in our department through the Vocera badge without being bound to a telephone."

The emergency department at Froedtert was the first department in the hospital system to try the technology on a trial basis last August. Departments throughout the facility are now in the process of adopting the technology. San Jose, Calif.-based Vocera was founded in 2000 by Rob Shostak, Randy Nielson and Paul Barsley, in an effort to curb their frustration with how the traditional phone systems usually led to people playing phone tag.

"They were looking to find the voice equivalent of instant messaging," said Victoria Holl, director of corporate marketing for Vocera Communications.

The system began shipping in 2002 and now has more than 600 full-scale installations across North America, the U.K., Australia and New Zealand, Holl added.

The software allows each user to have an individual profile, including their role, function and team assignments. At Froedtert, employees log into the hands-free Vocera badge and attach an ear piece to the device to ensure privacy.

"I'm guessing we spent three of four months, planning the set up of the communication trees that are put into the Vocera software," Decker said. "All of that planning has, we think, improved our length of stay with patients, and eliminated a number of different steps associated with moving a patient throughout the hospital. In a patient-centered environment, it's great to have that easy access to physician teams and specialists, really any individual, as they are walking around. Essentially you have increased your phones by a factor of 100 to serve as work flow devices."

The nursing department at Froedert recently began deploying the technology in their routine. The newly developed 26-bed Medical Intensive Care Unit recently moved into a new location in Froedert's North Tower, which was pre-equipped with Vocera drop points during its construction.

"It took some of the nurses in the department a little bit longer to adjust to the new technology," said Ellen Kozelek, a registered nurse. "Nurses often don't like changing their procedures, but the new technology allows us to locate each other easily within the unit and has also allowed us to adjust to the new facilities easier."

Sue Hoefs, another nurse in the sixth-floor intensive care unit, said, "The old space was more open, and not that we'd want to yell because it could often be disturbing for the patients, but we could call out if we needed help with something. The new facility is built in a large L shape, so we may not know where everyone is at a given time." "We have adjusted well to the new technology in just a few short weeks," Kozelek said. "It really helps our department run more efficiently, and we can respond to emergencies much more quickly."

About Alysha Schertz

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