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Weston Area Health NHS Trust migrates to

NHSmail



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is a ‘no-brainer’ ”

Weston Area Health Trust

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Provides foundation for future cost and efficiency savings

Weston Area Health NHS Trust (WAHT) is responsible for running Weston General Hospital – a 327 bed hospital supported by 1,800 staff. Based in Weston-super-Mare in Somerset, the hospital includes an emergency department, intensive care unit, new acute ward and day case unit. It also has an award winning midwife-led birth centre. The Trust runs community children's services from two other sites in the area.

On the face of it, the decision by Weston Area Health NHS Trust (WAHT) to migrate to NHSmail seemed straightforward enough. The Trust's local email system was beginning to creak and had become costly to maintain. It was becoming increasingly prone to spam and virus attacks and there was a danger it could also fail to meet regulatory requirements. To make matters worse, finding skilled staff to operate and maintain the system was becoming an increasing headache.

Something had to be done. A feasibility study concluded that it would cost £150,000 simply to replace the existing system and that excluded the cost of ongoing support and maintenance that would cost significantly more.

But there was another option. By migrating to NHSmail, WAHT could deploy a secure, robust, and powerful email service that would improve patient care and staff productivity. What's more, the migration, provision and support of the new service would be completed at almost zero cost to the Trust – the Trust were required to provide a local project manager to help manage the project and some temporary staff to support users through the transition.

'No brainer'

According to Richard Tyler, project sponsor and head of the Trust's IT department: "We could either spend our capital upgrading our existing system or we could spend it on patient care. For us, the decision to go ahead with NHSmail was a no brainer."

While the financial argument was compelling, the Trust did have some reservations. Concerns about potential data loss, business continuity and staff engagement were just some of the issues raised and each was addressed by the NHSmail team who had the technical know-how and experience to make the migration a success. And by executing the migration with Transend Corporation's migration utility, Transend Migrator, the NHSmail team was supremely confident the migration would be efficient, seamless and without obstacles.

Typically, NHSmail migration projects take between six and nine months to complete and WAHT – which employs around 1,800 staff - was no different. One of the first tasks was to enrol all new staff joining the Trust onto NHSmail.

Business as usual

Instead of carrying out a single ‘big bang’ move, migrations were divided into manageable groups spread over seven successive weekends in late 2009. In reality, migrations were completed in just a couple of hours on successive Friday evenings between October and November 2009. There was no impact on users and no email downtime. The local helpdesk only reported a handful of calls for each of the migrations and most of these concerned password resets. For those returning to work following the migration, it was business as usual – a totally seamless experience.

All this was possible thanks to the close working relationship between the WAHT project team and NHS Connecting for Health (NHS CFH) in conjunction with NHSmail supplier Cable&Wireless. Additionally, the Transend Migrator utility from Transend Corporation was used to execute the actual migration of mail system data and performed above and beyond expectations, especially with respect to data continuity and throughput.

Richard Tyler believes the migration to NHSmail has delivered a number of benefits: “Not only was the migration much smoother than anticipated, user reaction has also been very favourable. Many of our staff have expressed great satisfaction with the availability of a secure system they can access anytime, anywhere.

Focusing efforts and funds on patient care

“Migrating to NHSmail rather than upgrading our own system has allowed us to focus our efforts and funds on patient care. Looking ahead, we hope to make use of free fax and SMS to further reduce costs and improve the patient experience,” he said.

WAHT now has a robust email infrastructure that no longer represents a high risk of failure. It is secure, allowing the safe transfer of patient data and meets statutory and regulatory requirements. And as part of the overall NHSmail support, WAHT is covered by a comprehensive disaster recovery solution.

In financial terms, the Trust saved £150,000 in upfront investment costs for a replacement system covering expenditure such as hardware, software and licences. Neither does it face the additional costs associated with ongoing maintenance and support.

For staff, NHSmail provides secure access to their email accounts from any internet-enabled location and feedback suggests this has become a popular feature among users.

But this is just the start. As Richard Tyler pointed out, in the future WAHT will be able to harness the free fax and SMS services which will lead to further productivity improvements and cost savings.

But what of those who have to use the service? Despite some early reservations, Ivan Beretvas, a Consultant General Surgeon at the Trust, has been won over by the whole process.

“I was interested in the fact that work-related emails and the calendar could be accessed anywhere, which was not true of the previous system. But I was also concerned that a large amount of data would be lost and that it was possible that we would migrate to a system that was far worse than we had. But I needn’t have worried.

“The migration went much more smoothly than I anticipated – and I would happily recommend this system to other colleagues in different Trusts,” he said.

To find out more about migration to NHSmail and to contact us, visit:

<http://www.connectingforhealth.nhs.uk/systemsandservices/nhsmail/migration>