

Regions Hospital

+ *“My personal goal is to have one of the finest PACS in the country. The Merge PACS solution is helping Regions Hospital reach this goal along with several others. For example, the PACS has resulted in a high return-on-investment. Film costs have been reduced from \$250,000 to \$20,000 per year. In addition to eliminating film management and storage costs, Regions Hospital has been able to reduce the hours of staff coverage in the film room from seven to five days per week.”*

Paul Norsten, PACS administrator

Situation

Regions Hospital, located in St. Paul, Minnesota, is a private, not-for-profit 435-bed healthcare facility that serves a growing number of Twin Cities' residents. The fourth largest healthcare facility in the St. Paul area, Regions employs 989 physicians and admits 21,000 patients annually. The hospital features a wide range of specialized treatment centers, including the Burn Center, Birth Center, Heart Center, Digestive Care Center and a state-of-the-art Surgery Center.

Regions Hospital offers patients a place to quietly heal while receiving the most advanced medical treatment and technology available. It also serves as the hospital facility for HealthPartners, a non-profit, consumer-led organization. As part of this group, Regions Hospital's enterprise includes many clinics located throughout the area.

Regions Hospital and its affiliated HealthPartners clinics are growing rapidly. To provide care for more patients and supply resources for an increasing number of referring and on-staff physicians, Regions Hospital's technology infrastructure must stay one step ahead of its fast-paced growth.

Requirements

Moving from a film-based medical imaging system to a PACS has been a large part of this initiative. “We keep expanding, both within the hospital and throughout our enterprise which includes more than 30 clinics,” Paul Norsten, PACS administrator says. “Film-based images were expensive and difficult to share among our physicians and staff.”

Regions Hospital needs medical image viewing capabilities that its healthcare professionals can count on to be continually available across multiple locations. With a small technology staff, Regions requires an easy-to-manage solution that features a simple user interface for training and implementation. The technology staff was looking for a full PACS solution that could meet these important requirements.

Solution

When Paul and the technology staff began researching PACS solutions, they quickly recognized that the Merge Healthcare Merge PACS software met their criteria. “Merge PACS is designed to match the way radiologists work,” Paul explains. “And Dell's reputation for providing reliable systems made us comfortable selecting a Merge Healthcare solution based on Dell hardware.”

As part of the PACS solution, Regions Hospital has a main PACS archive as well as a backup server in the radiology department for failover protection. There is also a backup server for the hospital's old devices such as jukebox. “We have had jukebox technology since 1997 and still need a way to access that data. When implementing new technology, it has to work with your existing technology until you can phase it out,” Paul advises.

Regions Hospital has more than 35 Merge PACS workstations deployed throughout the enterprise. “There is a Merge Healthcare DataBridge link to the HIS/RIS system that stores patient and study demographic data. Interfacing it with Merge PACS allows patient reports and images to display side by side,” Paul says. Two Merge Healthcare film digitizers are being used to purge the old film and enable prior film-based studies to be added to the

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Paul Norsten, PACS administrator

workflow and save on printing costs. To further enhance efficient information sharing, Regions also uses Merge Healthcare’s ImageCD, an image and results distribution solution used to disseminate results on CD to both patients and referring physicians.

Regions Hospital utilizes Enterprise Web to enable a Web-based distribution of both images and results within the enterprise. Currently, more than 2,000 users have access to Enterprise Web. Web-based distribution system allows both radiologists and referring physicians to access information throughout the hospital and outlying facilities. This growing solution is being integrated with the hospital’s Electronic Medical Record (EMR) system to provide an unparalleled level of access to all medical information within the enterprise. Additionally, studies are housed and shared on a Network Attached Storage (NAS) solution. What’s more, referring physicians are allowed into the password-protected Web browser through VPN connections or by using a link on the hospital’s web site to access proxy servers behind the firewall.

Result

The PACS solution has improved radiologists’ workflow and increased efficiency. Patients are able to receive scan results much more quickly, and more physicians are using the PACS technology. The Dell hardware has provided a reliable, highly available platform that enables staff access to critical patient data anytime, anywhere. Additionally, the Merge PACS solution is scalable so that the PACS system can grow as the hospital does.

The PACS solution has also become a positive marketing tool that is helping Regions Hospital reach its growth goals. In fact, the facility is opening a new imaging center in October of 2005. “Our PACS gives us a big competitive advantage,” Paul says. “We are able to attract more patients and generate more revenue.” But the most important goal that the PACS has helped Regions achieve is better patient care. And that is a goal that reaches far beyond the hospital grounds and its clinics into St. Paul residents’ lives.

About Merge Healthcare

Merge Healthcare is the leading provider of enterprise imaging and interoperability solutions. Merge solutions facilitate the sharing of images to create a more effective and efficient electronic healthcare experience for patients and physicians. Merge provides enterprise imaging solutions for radiology, cardiology and orthopaedics; a suite of products for clinical trials; software for financial and pre-surgical management, and applications that fuel the largest modality vendors in the world. Merge’s products have been used by healthcare providers, vendors and researchers worldwide to improve patient care for more than 20 years. Additional information can be found at www.merge.com.

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