Client Story

University Hospitals North Midlands NHS Trust

CISCO PARTNER Networking Preferred

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Background

University Hospitals North Midlands (UHNM) is home to Royal Stoke Hospital, County Hospital, and Staffordshire Children's Hospital at Royal Stoke.

Created in 2014, 12,300 people work across its three sites to serve three million patients. Not only is UHNM one of the largest hospitals in the West Midlands, with one of the busiest Emergency Departments in the country, but it's also a major teaching Trust with a strong reputation for medical research.

UHNM's ambition is to be a world-class centre of clinical and academic achievement: *a place where staff work together to ensure patients receive the very best health care, and where the best people want to come to learn, work, and research.*

- **13,500 staff**
- **3 hospitals**
- **3 million patients**

Challenge

Outdated and fragmented network infrastructure

Legacy systems: The network and communication service was based on a 2004/2005 specification—predating modern digital healthcare needs.

Frequent outages: 22 major incidents in 18 months caused 12 days of downtime, severely impacting clinical services.

Fragmentation: Multiple suppliers and complex PFI contracts led to challenging, inefficient, and insecure network management.

Digital maturity gap: The Trust scored low in national digital infrastructure assessments, failing to meet NHS England standards.

Urgent need for change: A modern, unified, and resilient network was essential to ensure patient safety, improve productivity, and support digital transformation.

UHNM's network services' specification was through a Private Finance Initiative (PFI) which predated the iPhone. However, it was contracted to oversee network services until 2044, which was untenable. Wi-Fi was entirely absent from the specification, and PFI providers were unable to confirm whether UHNM's Wi-Fi met the necessary requirements of an acute major trauma tertiary centre. The poor latency being experienced across the sites said it didn't.

An agreement was reached to break out of the network services element of the PFI contract. UHNM made the bold decision to take the network and collaboration estates in-house with a new 12-person team. Though this carried risk, the risk of not solving the problem of repeated downtime and non-performance was far greater.

UHNM's challenge was to chart a new path forward in managing its network services itself. External support was essential for this huge undertaking.

“Now I feel like we are the masters of our own destiny, we’ve got hope and the ability.”

Amy Freeman, Director of Digital Transformation

Solution

UHNM partnered with Block in September 2023 to work through three phases: the initial migration, mitigation, and transformation. The partnership was essential for the migration to take place smoothly and to cordinate several people and partners at various stages.

Managing the project on a day-to-day basis, we provided an array of support from due diligence and developing principles to fronting contracts. We consolidated all licensing for collaboration and networking, and built an enterprise agreement over five years to hit significant cost savings with centralised access to all licences. Furthermore, we acted as a vital sounding board for a team finding its feet on fresh foundations.

Block looked beyond short-term wins to the future state UHNM ultimately wants to get to with its network management. Our network assessment service helped translate UHNM’s vision into a practical, customised roadmap that could realistically deliver on the outcomes needed. We helped to develop and implement an operating model and an integrated set of standard operating procedures. In addition, we built monitoring and management platforms, having defined service levels, roles, and responsibilities.

Now, implementing the transformation strategy is underway, beginning with the design and mapping stage **“to make the network not just better than it was, but far better than it was before,”** says David Tudor, Head of Service Delivery.

Consolidating UHNM’s network and telephony services has begun, as well as efforts to improve coverage, with County Hospital seeing an increase in access points.

“Now I feel like we are the masters of our own destiny,” says Amy Freeman, Director of Digital Transformation, **“we’ve got hope and the ability.”**

Results

Reaching a higher level of digital maturity requires reduced risk and increased confidence. Future innovations can only be introduced when there is assurance that the infrastructure supporting them is resilient enough to handle the demands.

The UHNM network is now more stable than ever, ensuring people and devices stay connected. Reliable internet connectivity is taken for granted, but sorely missed when it's absent—particularly by those patients who spend days, weeks or even months on a ward. Televisions are to be cost-effectively installed in every comfort room to improve the patient entertainment experience at UHNM. They will deliver TV shows via Wi-Fi, without the need for a traditional aerial from the roof that would have cost tens of thousands of pounds.

The upcoming launch of Electronic Prescribing and Medicines Administration' (ePMA) at County Hospital will see UHNM start to replace the current paper-based system. ePMA will cut medication errors and reduce the risk of related serious incidents, improving patient safety. The reduction in time to prescribe, checks, supply, and administer medicines means clinicians can spend more time with their patients for optimum care. ePMA also means 24/7 access to electronic medication records and patient history, with allergies and interactions highlighted.

ePMA will go on to serve as a springboard for digital observation, resulting in more efficient resource allocation and enhanced clinical data collection as a result.

The positive impact of ending the PFI and managing network services in-house has been felt by UHNM and beyond, helping to elevate other Trusts and the NHS as a whole. For example, Haywood Hospital is a minor injuries unit that is part of the Midlands Partnership Foundation Trust, but which fell under UHNM's PFI. This small community hospital has since benefited from its relationship with the multimillion-pound Trust. As a result it's experienced the same rewards as Royal Stoke and County Hospital.

UHNM's migration has created insights useful for other NHS Trusts, covering topics such as end of project report artefacts and due diligence best practices. **"We are very comfortable and happy to share with anybody who is in a similar position—either coming out of a PFI or indeed coming out of another third-party contract,"** says Amy Freeman.

"We are affecting more than one organisation with the actual change that took place, and we are very comfortable enabling those lessons to be learned and shared with other NHS organisations."

Amy Freeman, Director of Digital Transformation

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