

Beechwood goes high-tech with communications system

BY TRACEY DRURY

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Nursing homes and assisted-living centers are always striving to make their facilities more home-like and comfortable for residents and visitors.

But the comfort of a private room or mood of a sitting area can be shattered in an instant by an overhead page on a broadcast PA system.

Beechwood Home has installed a new system designed not only to eliminate overhead pages and nursing station speakers, but also to help provide a more-efficient system of communication between caregivers, residents and their families.

The facility, part of the Beechwood Continuing Care network, worked with IPLogic to install a wireless communications system that incorporates phones, nurse call systems, a computer network and Internet access. The goal was to be able to communicate as effectively as possible, while reducing the ambient noise that comes with overhead paging systems, says Robert Meiss, president and CEO.

"We were all accustomed to the old way when that was the only way to do it," Meiss says. "We came to the realization that all of the extraneous noises in the lives of families, residents and staff clearly wasn't what we all wanted and they deserved.

"The additional benefit is it enables us to respond to our residents' needs more quickly," he says.

For residents, the only noticeable change is the reduction of noises and rate of response. They still pull a cord in their bedroom or bathroom for assistance, but from there, the wireless system takes over. In the



Ralph Camp, R.N., left, unit manager at Beechwood Home, and Peter Calandra, director of IT, check out components in a wireless communications system that has been installed at the facility.

event of a power outage, the entire telecommunications system is supported by an automatic battery backup and emergency generators.

Total cost for the project, including both the new phone system and the wireless nurse call system, was about \$350,000. The traditional nursing home system had separate systems for telephone and the nurse call system.

"What we've done is really tied them all together and put them in a position where they could talk to each other," says Peter Havens, director of sales and marketing at IPLogic, who says Beechwood is leading the

pack in terms of industry adoption of such systems. "At this stage, they are still very unique in what they are doing."

Staff say the change has been positive, giving them the opportunity to provide better care by eliminating steps in the process. Mary Schaffer, a unit manager, said it's also easier for staff members to find and communicate with each other and find quicker assistance, when necessary, to address resident needs.

"In the past, the call went to the nurses' station, the secretary or whoever would take the information and disseminate that out to the staff. Now the person getting the

call might be just a room away. It's saving a lot of time and getting rid of the ambient noise," says Ralph Camp, nurse manager.

Peter Calandra, IT director at Beechwood, said the new systems are easy to maintain and offer unique reporting functions that were not previously available. That includes the ability to log and track every call between a resident from their phones. That feature is especially helpful in tracking residents who may need more services, as well as those with impaired memory, who may incorrectly believe staff are not responding to their calls.

"It has allowed us to take a look at our response times and our staffing requirements," he says. "If we have a resident that has many more calls for help than other residents do, it may lead us to shift our staffing around to meet the needs.

"It also allows us to put that resident's family at ease. They know we're taking care of them as best we possibly can," Calandra says.

By the end of 2008, the entire facility will be wired for the nurse call system. Phase two of the project will include replacing an older PBX phone system with Cisco IP phones, as well as asset management using RFID to keep track of wheelchairs, infusion pumps and other equipment. It will also include using the wireless environment to provide for a campuswide wireless Internet network.

The wireless Internet feature will give guests access on their personal computers, as well as residents in the short-term rehabilitation center who need to keep up on their business.

Video conferencing and teleconferencing also will be enabled.

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