CASE STUDY

How **Aultman Hospital** is using technology to keep patients, families, and staff safe during COVID-19

Aultman Hospital, located in Canton, Ohio, is part of the Aultman Health Foundation, a not-for-profit integrated healthcare system that includes Aultman Orrville Hospital, Aultman Alliance Community Hospital, the locally managed health insurance provider AultCare, The Aultman Foundation and Aultman College. With 1,032 beds, over 800 active physicians, and a team of more than 7,000 employees, Aultman is Stark County's largest provider of healthcare services. Ranked by Forbes in 2019 as one of America's best employers by state, Aultman has faced unprecedented challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic in fulfilling the mission to lead its community to improved health. Principal among these challenges are protecting the safety of healthcare workers, patients, and their families, and dealing with the financial impacts of the crisis due to the cancellation of non-emergency procedures.

> "We haven't faced an enemy like we are facing today in 102 years. We are at war."

Mike DeWine
Governor
State of Ohio

AULTMAN

EARLY ACTIONS ON COVID-19 HELPED FLATTEN THE CURVE

Rafael Gonzalez is the Chief Technology Officer of Aultman Hospital. We spoke with him amidst the peak of the crisis to better understand how the hospital is coping during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"The state of Ohio took a different approach to the crisis than other states by issuing one of the nation's earliest shelter-in-place (SIP) orders on March 23," Gonzalez said. "Although this was considered by many at the time to be controversial, it has helped us tremendously in keeping the curve down." While it's clear now that such measures have helped save lives, little attention has been given in the media to the economic consequences of the crisis for regional healthcare organizations like Aultman. Cancellation of non-essential procedures, doctor's appointments, and outpatient visits has had a devastating financial impact on the country's healthcare providers.

Aultman was among the first hospitals to stop visitations. This was a difficult decision, according to Gonzalez, given Aultman's community-driven mission of commitment to the health of patients and family members. Among the many early challenges Gonzalez faced was how to keep patients and their families connected, and how to enable non-clinical staff to work remotely.

KEEPING PATIENTS AND STAFF CONNECTED

Ensuring secure connectivity during the crisis has been difficult for IT teams at all organizations. For healthcare organizations, it has been critical for ensuring ongoing operations and keeping patients connected with their families. Under the direction of Gonzalez, the Aultman IT team was able to move swiftly on both fronts. They had a project in place using mobile workstations that was repurposed to enable each unit within the hospital to provide video conferencing between patients and their families. "This virtual visitation program was tremendously popular with patients and staff. Patients connected with family members from across the country. One patient, who couldn't speak because of an intubation, used a whiteboard the staff provided to communicate with family members in Florida and Colorado," Gonzalez said.

Doing more with less and **using technology to support new challenge**s like controlling patient and staff traffic flow and social distancing will be essential to Aultman's success.

To connect more than 1,000 remote, non-clinical workers, the IT team set up 300 virtual desktops, adding additional storage to enable these, along with VPN connections for laptop users. "Getting the backend processes ready to support that many users, in a matter of weeks, was quite stressful. But our team worked around the clock to make it happen," Gonzalez said.

SUPPORT FROM PARTNERS HAS BEEN CRITICAL

Dealing with the financial impacts of the COVID-19 crisis represents an ongoing challenge. The Aultman executive and management teams, excluding clinical staff, all took pay cuts. "Several of our key technology partners have stepped up to the plate, and for that we are eternally grateful," Gonzalez said. This support included free additional data storage from Infinidat, extending total capacity to over 1 petabyte, free extended trial licenses from VMware, and increased bandwidth from Spectrum to support remote users.

Asked to comment on lessons learned during the crisis and changes in IT strategy moving forward, Gonzalez says, "From a technical perspective, we used duct tape and creativity to get things up and running. Moving forward, we need to rethink everything, especially from a financial perspective. Doing more with less, being able to scale cost-effectively, and using technology to support new challenges like controlling patient and staff traffic flow and social distancing will be essential to our success."

To learn more about how Infinidat can help your organization scale to win, visit Infinidat.com.

"Early measures by the state helped us flatten the curve. Early actions to enable non-clinical staff to work remotely and to keep patients and their families connected were among our highest technical priorities."

Rafael Gonzalez
Chief Technology Officer
Aultman Hospital

INFINIDAT