BlackBerry and Grand River Hospital Partner Via BBM Enterprise To Provide Security, Coordination, and Better Care

Grand River Hospital

Industry:
Healthcare

Company Size:
4,000

Location:
Canada

Product:
BBM® Enterprise,
BlackBerry® UEM

Website:
http://www.grhosp.on.ca/

At a Glance

Grand River Hospital is one of Ontario's largest community hospitals. To attain the highest level of efficiency and the best patient outcomes possible, it needed to enable health providers to communicate with one another in real time, while remaining secure and compliant. To achieve this, it chose BBM® Enterprise, a powerful secure messaging tool with security controls that meet the rigorous privacy needs of healthcare.

The Organization

One of the largest hospitals in Southwestern Ontario, Grand River Hospital (GRH) provides innovative, quality care to more than 700,000 residents in Waterloo Region and Guelph Wellington. GRH also works closely with St. Mary's General Hospital in the provision of care to the community.

GRH is a leading healthcare organization, offering cancer and renal services, care for seriously ill and injured adults, services for mothers, newborns, and children; emergency care, mental health and addictions; and care for older adults including rehabilitation. The hospital is also privileged to be a key partner in health sciences learning, with a rapidly-growing role in both academic and applied research.

GRH patients benefit from the services of several thousand staff members, among them both healthcare professionals and volunteers. These patients are served at both the Freeport and Kitchener-Waterloo campuses as well as satellite locations in Waterloo Region and Wellington County.

The Challenge

Effective and efficient communication is critical in healthcare – especially in a hospital setting. In an active care situation, a physician often needs to securely consult or confer with other team members. Doing so over the phone is both inefficient and prone to miscommunication.

"Phone calls are difficult for physicians, because they're everywhere in the hospital, and constantly moving from place to place," explains Sylvia Carney, Manager, Information Privacy and Access at GRH. "Connecting with other physicians in a timely fashion is challenging, and every second counts. We needed to provide an efficient alternative."

Like many hospitals, GRH's workforce is progressively becoming more mobile. However, many clerical staff members depend on desktop computers as well. It was clear to decision-makers at the hospital that whatever solution they chose, it would in some way incorporate mobility. However, this presented its own set of challenges.

Email was not a suitable alternative, nor was SMS. In both cases, communication of personal health information (PHI) would have potentially resulted in a breach of privacy.

"Everyday text messaging would not work for us," says Kathleen Lavoie, Grand River Hospital's Chief Information Management Officer and Chief Privacy Officer. "We needed a service that was secure and encrypted, so our patients' health information remained private."

"There's a lot of communication between physicians," adds Dr. Darren Knibutat, Chief of Radiology at GRH and a key user of BBM Enterprise. "Everyone has a smartphone. So the concern is when that kind of information is being spread, is it secure and protected."

GRH needed a secure platform to minimize the time lost in communications with the direct care team and between several other staff groups at the hospital. It needed a way to efficiently connect hospital staff and physicians with one another while also mitigating risk. More importantly, they needed a mobile communication service that was easy to use.

The Solution

BlackBerry and Grand River Hospital partnered in the implementation of BBM Enterprise in a healthcare setting. Since GRH has a large presence of BlackBerry devices deployed within the organization, and because its administrators use BlackBerry® UEM to manage its mobile fleet, decision-makers saw value in staying with the same vendor. The application is not exclusive to BlackBerry devices.

"Especially with privacy legislation in the province being what it is, security is extremely important," notes Carney. "It simply made sense to work with BlackBerry on a solution that met GRH's needs."

"This developed into a partnership between BlackBerry and GRH to innovate and enhance BBM Protected into BBM Enterprise," adds Lavoie. "We have collaborated to ensure the application would meet the range of hospital privacy and security needs, which are very extensive and constantly evolving. We've loved working with BlackBerry because when a care provider indicated a function they wanted, BlackBerry's engineers would work with us to realize their vision."

Security aside, group chat was one of the most critical features of BBM Enterprise for Grand River. The ability to arrange physicians and hospital staff into groups based on their role makes it easy for users to connect with the experts they need, when they need them. This, says Carney, allows everyone to stay on the same page, and quickly feed information to one another about evolving situations. Enhancements to the contact page ensure all users know who's on BBM and allow users to search for one another by name, title, and (assuming a physician is a member of a BBM Group) role.

The message expiry feature was also important to GRH. Messages in a conversation only persist over a 48-hour window before being cleared from all devices. This way, there's no risk that personal health information (PHI) might end up residing on a physician or clinician's device.

There were some features of BBM Enterprise that GRH did not wish to make accessible to its users, such as cut and paste, and storing photographs on the device. According to Carney, these features did not contribute to the level of security GRH needed to achieve, nor were they necessary for the application to be effective and useful to staff using the platform. The hospital thus worked closely with BlackBerry to customize features before deployment.

"We didn't want people saving messages or sharing messages and photos outside of the application," explains Carney. "We wanted to keep them very aware that this is meant for real time. In 48 hours, it's gone from their devices."

"We looked at it as a benefit for our department to communicate with physicians that refer to us, not only from the emergency department, but also among ourselves in a protected format," adds Dr. Knibutat.

"In addition to highquality care, the security of personal health information is one of our most important responsibilities. With BBM Enterprise, we are able to ensure both, allowing care providers to consult each other about a patient's needs in a timely, secure manner"

- Kathleen Lavoie,
Chief Information Management Officer/ Chief Privacy Officer, Grand River Hospital

The Results

Currently, GRH has completed a partial rollout of BBM Enterprise, a precursor to a larger deployment. The hospital's medical imaging department has become a key user group for the application's implementation.

Through the instant messaging platform, care providers can now communicate in real time about patient status, significantly enhancing their workflows. In addition to reducing the risk of a PHI breach on a mobile device, this has created efficiencies for busy health professionals.

GRH's Chief of Staff, Dr. Peter Potts, sees great potential for the tool. "I'm quite certain that as additional physicians get started using it [BBM Enterprise], they'll quickly realize the benefits of this secure and timely method of communication," predicts Dr. Potts.

Specific advantages include:

Improved Care with Minimized Risk: By making BBM Enterprise available to physicians, Grand River Hospital has provided a secure means of communicating personal health information between providers while remaining aligned with provincial legislation related to personal health information on mobile devices. Health providers are experiencing the benefits first hand.

"When a patient in the emergency department is seen, an emergency physician may want a CT scan," says Dr. Knibutat. "That order comes into our clerical staff, who will now BBM the radiologists. They'll get a popup message and can then type in their approval for the study and how the technologists should acquire the study, and then it happens. Previously, the radiologists would have to answer a page or make a couple of calls, tying them up for 10 to 15 minutes. Now it takes less than a minute in an all-secure format."

Thanks to BBM Enterprise, even finding a physician on call has become a simple process taking just seconds to complete.

"If you call a physician – whether at home or a private practice – then wait for a callback and it gets relayed through a message or service, the chain of communication has potential for delay at multiple points. With BBM Enterprise, responses can be immediate," explains Carney.

One feature in particular that Lavoie and her team liked was the ability to send protected messages to users who are using the standard BBM app. With BBM Enterprise, the encryption extends to even non-protected users. This allows physicians who have BBM Enterprise to send secure messages to clinicians not affiliated with Grand River Hospital, such as physicians receiving patient transfers.

Better Communication: With BBM Enterprise, hospital staff can more easily connect across departments. More importantly, they can do so without using code language as they might over unsecured text messaging or the phone. Both clinical and non-clinical personnel can make themselves more available to one another, thereby minimizing communication silos that are prevalent in healthcare.

Leading in Secure Communications: Another goal articulated by Carney was that GRH wished to position itself at the forefront of secure messaging solutions in healthcare. Through BBM Enterprise, she feels her organization has done exactly that. By providing a secure solution with a comprehensive policy and end-user agreement, GRH has made itself both more efficient and more secure.

"Without BBM Enterprise, care providers may use different ways of communicating," adds Dr. Knibutat. "Now we're all on the same page. From a chief's perspective, I'm very comfortable that my members have a vehicle to use that keeps them in compliance with privacy legislation and best practices. While we initially started with the mobile app, BlackBerry's development of the BBM Enterprise desktop app has allowed us much stronger communication between those of us using smartphones and other staff members whose work is more based on conventional computers."

"It's not just physicians talking to physicians," says Carney. "BBM Enterprise allows our physicians to connect with technologists and clerical staff quickly and securely. It completed the communications circle throughout the medical imaging group. They can work together to improve process flows in medical imaging, and ultimately, improve patient care."

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