Divisions of General Practice embrace secure broadband

With stage two of the Federal Government's Broadband for Health Program (BFH) now underway, General Practitioners (GPs) are not only obtaining an incentive for broadband connections; the Government, Divisions of General Practice and Pacific Internet are ensuring GPs are securely connected and positioned to embrace e-health initiatives.

e-health initiatives can deliver significant practice efficiencies – but having a secure, business grade broadband connection is fundamental to adoption.

Broadband enables e-health

The Government is investing heavily in its e-health agenda. Online Claiming (previously know as HIC Online) is a system already being used by around 30% of GPs to claim Medicare benefits over the Internet.

Another Federal Government initiative is HealthConnect – an attempt to build an integrated health system and a centralised repository of patient records. For example, if a person has a car crash in NSW but is from QLD, the attending doctor will have access to the patient's allergy records and will avoid prescribing incorrect medication.

Alberto Tinazzi is the Broadband for Health Implementation Officer at the Alliance of NSW Divisions and his role involves promoting the Department of Health and Ageing's (DoHA's) BFH initiative to the 37 Divisions of General Practice and more then 2,600 practices in his state.

He recalls when the Government funded IT officers at Divisions to promote computerisation of General Practices several years ago. He says today around 80% of GPs are computerised as a result; but the next step is promoting electronic communication by increasing the take-up of broadband.

"We're still in the early stages of developing an integrated health system. The sector needs to build systems and networks and the Government is still working on national standards. There are complexities due to the sensitive nature of information, so getting security and privacy right are big issues we need to bed down in the development stages.

One of the issues holding us back is that many GPs still aren't online. The first step is getting them connected to secure broadband and BFH is playing an important role in encouraging this," says Alberto Tinazzi.

About Pacific Internet's Broadband for Health plans

Pacific Internet's Health Plus SecureSite plans offer a fully managed and maintained security service using robust Cisco hardware to protect patient data.

The plans include:
- *business grade Internet connection*
- *fast speeds*
- *high levels of data*
- *firewall security*
- *intrusion detection*
- *24x7 monitoring*
- *email*
- *dial-up back-up connection*
- *bonus dial-up connection for use at home*

Pacific Internet

The Hunter Urban Division of General Practice (HUDGP) selected Pacific Internet as their preferred BFH approved Internet provider. More than 18 months on, 90 of its GP practices are connected through Pacific Internet.

Industry learns from the Hunter Urban Division of General Practice

The Hunter Urban Division of General Practice (HUDGP), a representative body for GPs in the Newcastle and Hunter area of NSW, is known as a technically progressive Division that has embraced secure broadband connectivity and is already involved in HealthConnect trials.

Pacific Internet's work with HUDGP is a prime example of an industry group working with a solution focused provider to embark on a technology roll-out where there's historically been a slow take-up rate of broadband.

Alberto Tinazzi says: "To date, HUDGP has the highest BFH take-up rate out of all Divisions in NSW. Credit goes to their hard work and vision."

Chris Scott, HUDGP's Chief Information Officer, says: "In giving our GPs easy and fast access to secure clinical communication, we needed a reliable and responsive partner. Pacific Internet was chosen because of its focus on the needs of General Practice and its commitment to the Hunter."

Pacific Internet's broadband DSL plans meet the strict criteria of both HUDGP and the DoHA, and were chosen because they're the highest quality business grade plans on the market. HUDGP's GPs have access to 1500/256kbps business grade broadband connections with 22GB of data. The connections are bundled with robust Cisco routers for additional security and feature 24x7 business grade technical support, a 99% service level guarantee and just recently, a managed security service. Importantly, the tailored HUDGP bundle also includes free data traffic between HUDGP and all its GPs, making the potential use of shared online health applications affordable and effective among the group.

This solution means that HUDGP's members don't need to be IT experts, which was an important consideration for a group of professionals who need to focus on their core competency of providing medical services. Also, HUDGP's IT support function runs smoothly as they deal with one major provider that understands their unique requirements.

Chris Scott says: "It's important to realise we're providing more than just broadband links for our GPs. What we're tying to do is provide a managed service that includes reconfiguring their internal network and providing GPs with high-end security measures using Cisco routers. The end result is a rock solid connection and a network that's dependable and secure."

For example, HUDGP's Information Management and Technology (IM&T) team backs-up its GPs' firewall configurations twice daily and automatic comparisons of one with the other ensure unauthorised changes can be detected and addressed. And to take this one step further, six monthly firewall configurations are physically reviewed by an IM&T member.

"We also perform tasks such as configuring routers to allow diagnostic reports to be sent to GPs from service providers such as radiology and pathology service providers," says Chris Scott. "This means our GPs securely receive pathology and x-ray reports via the Internet, which requires certain firewall configurations."

On top of all this, HUDGP manage a high-end anti-virus solution as part of its service to GPs.

"This is important as most doctors would not know where to begin in establishing such an advanced, enterprise level managed security service," says Chris Scott.

"We also help our GPs use Cisco remote access software to establish a Virtual Private Network (VPN) link from their home to surgery. From a patient care perspective, this means our GPs can make correct decisions in emergency situations," he says.

"Going forward, in stage two of our relationship with Pacific Internet, we will be using their Health Plus SecureSite offering. This BFH approved plan, bundles business grade connectivity with Cisco hardware that has intrusion detection and prevention capabilities and will be fully managed by Pacific Internet," says Chris Scott.

In recognition of the outstanding work achieved with HUDGP, Pacific Internet won a prestigious Australian Telecommunications User Group (ATUG) Award for 'Best Broadband Solution in the Hunter Valley' in November 2005.

ATUG

Australian
Telecommunications
Users Group

"In stage one, my IM&T team were configuring and managing the Cisco routers but Pacific Internet will gradually take over and deliver the managed security service," says Chris Scott.

"Pacific Internet will also provide 24x7 first line connectivity support, which we've been taking care of up till now.

Our two organisations have built such a strong relationship that I'm confident Pacific Internet has both the technical skills and the understanding of GPs' unique needs to take on this large responsibility," says Chris Scott.

By doing this, HUDGP's IM&T team will be free to focus on GPs' individual system needs and more complex networking solutions.

"Not only has HUDGP partnered with a great company for connectivity, but by working with Pacific Internet we've been able to implement a managed broadband service to a group of doctors, who are mostly non-technical.

We've also achieved an ongoing emphasis on security improvement," says Chris Scott.

HUDGP is positioning itself and its GPs on a completely managed, secure network so they're well placed to take-up e-health initiatives, like HealthConnect and messaging (which will allow clinical information to be transferred electronically between health providers where previously the messages were on pieces of paper).

One of the advantages is that HUDGP already has several multi site practices connecting together over a PacNet Private Network – this uses Pacific Internet's Multiprotocol Label Switching (MPLS) network to establish secure, private links with HUDGP's head office and sites and also between sites.

"While we're not yet using an application service provider model to deliver services over private networks – we are exploring this opportunity," says Chris Scott.

Pacific Internet and HUDGP have an award-winning partnership. *Pictured above: Chris Scott, Chief Information Officer, HUDGP (left) and Nigel Stitt, National Sales Manager, Pacific Internet.*

Illawarra Division of General Practice (IDGP) recently selected Pacific Internet as its preferred broadband provider and plans to link up to 90 surgeries within the next year.

www.idgp.org.au

Illawarra Division of General Practice begins its broadband roll-out

The BFH advocate at Illawarra Division of General Practice (IDGP) is Ray Fitch, their IT Support Officer. His team is charged with internal IT support for the Division and external IT support for its doctors.

Pacific Internet was selected as IDGP's Internet partner because of its business focus and ability to offer highly secure Cisco hardware as part of the bundle. The IDGP's Information Management Information Technology (IMIT) team knew of HUDGP's success in working with Pacific Internet using Cisco hardware and were keen to leverage this experience.

Ray Fitch says: "In our experience, BFH take-up among IDGP GPs has been fairly low. GPs need to be able to take the time to look at the initiative and in many cases require clarifications because the high number of plans available on the program make it look complicated. GPs also look at monthly prices from a small business owner's perspective, even though it's covered by the incentive, and some decide not to adopt broadband as they don't want that financial commitment at the end of the BFH incentive period.

The way we overcome these challenges is to explain the benefits of high-end secure broadband plans and while GPs may believe they're above their individual requirements or outside their desired price point, at the end of the BFH incentive period they can reassess their connectivity needs and negotiate a plan to suit."

"We also provide advice by highlighting that part of GPs' business decisions must involve considering appropriate security measures to protect patient information. And that's why we like recommending the Cisco routers and Pacific Internet," Ray Fitch says.

By using Cisco routers, IDGP have the functionality to configure secure VPNs for its GPs and can also deploy high-end firewalls at the surgeries to protect patient data.

"Pacific Internet does the initial configuration of each router, and helped to set up one router for a VPN. But we decided to manage the routers going forward as our IMIT team are Cisco accredited."

With the secure broadband solution proposed, IDGP GPs will soon be more mobile. "It will be easier for GPs to access their clinical records from wherever they are. For example, if a GP is called at home with an emergency they will be able to securely VPN into the surgery, check the patient's medical records and make the necessary recommendation," says Ray Fitch.

Establishing VPNs also means that Divisions and surgeries can securely connect, allowing Ray Fitch and his team to offer remote IT support.

"If a practice is having a printing problem they can call and ask us to connect remotely. We can take control of their PC while they watch their screen to see how we solve the problem. Demand on our time is then reduced and so are the costs as the surgery doesn't need to pay for an on-site visit," says Ray Fitch.

When considering the experience IDGP has had, Ray Fitch says: "Pacific Internet has been excellent. When there are problems or we've had questions, their phone support people are able to do things I consider fairly advanced. This was definitely one of the main drawcards – we knew Pacific Internet had excellent staff capable of fixing network problems quickly."

> "Securing patient data is an issue we need to consider very seriously. It's good that Pacific Internet's BFH plans include Cisco routers and a managed security option. Both companies have good reputations for providing high levels of security and reliability,"
>
> *Alberto Tinazzi, Alliance of NSW Divisions*

www.bbfh.com.au

Networks on the horizon

While Divisions are currently classified as a "network", they're not actually connected from an IT and data perspective.

Alberto Tinazzi says: "There are lots of opportunities to share information. For example, Divisions develop training materials for GPs and also program information, whether it's on chronic disease management or information management. We believe a private network between all the Divisions to share such information would be immensely valuable."

One of the initiatives relevant to Divisions and other health organisations is the recently announced Managed Health Network funding worth $17 million. Divisions or organisations willing to develop managed networks can apply for funding that will support health care providers' access to broadband networks. This will improve connectivity and enhance access to information and digital applications.

Inline with this, HUDGP's five year plan is to create a community managed health network.

"We're planning on submitting a proposal to the Government, working with Pacific Internet and some other parties, to obtain funding under the new Managed Health Network initiative so we can link local aged care services, general practitioners, specialists and the Hunter New England Area Heath Service," says Chris Scott.

Alberto Tinazzi says: "It will be positive to see as many Divisions and State Based Organisations as possible apply for the grant. The Alliance is considering many possibilities and is actively encouraging Divisions in NSW to form consortia with other relevant partners and apply for the funding."

Pacific Internet is currently working with Divisions to implement secure, managed health networks as part of this initiative. We welcome interested Divisions to contact us on 1300 553 700.

CISCO SYSTEMS

Pacific Internet provides eligible practices with a totally subsidised[1] and highly secure BFH service, powered by robust Cisco hardware.

Four tips for a secure broadband roll-out

1. Consider the Internet provider's reputation

Talk to other Divisions or State Based Organisations (SBOs) and learn from their broadband roll-out experience

2. Think about your security requirements and IT resources

Consider a managed security service for GPs to maximise your IT resources and ensure you're positioned to take advantage of Government initiatives

3. Understand the benefits of broadband

Educate your GPs on the importance of secure high speed connections that enhance everyday operations and protect patient data

4. Stretch your buying power further

Select one Internet provider that understands your unique requirements to tailor your Division's solution to maximise efficiencies and leverage group buying power

Pacific Internet will help eligible GPs take advantage of the Government subsidy. For details visit www.pacific.net.au/health

1 For BFH Subsidy information visit www.health.gov.au/ehealth/broadband
  Information correct at time of printing, subject to variation.

> Your Pacific Internet Contact is:

> Contact Pacific Internet

Speak to one of Pacific Internet's health communications specialists today.

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