

CAN WE TALK?

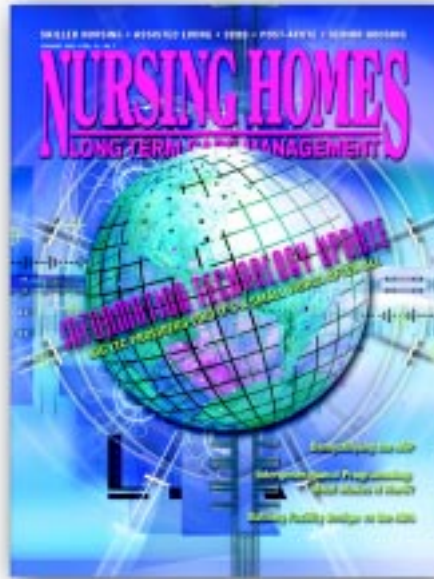
COMMUNICATIONS MADE POSSIBLE THROUGH COMPUTER TECHNOLOGY

Evangelical Lutheran Good Samaritan Society (GSS)—1 for 240, 240 for 1

To understand the organizational change that GSS has gone through, imagine if you were a business with 240 branches in 25 states. Each branch has its own information management system, with its own way of keeping updated, and with personal computers (PCs) susceptible to disk drive failures and bugs, each costing around \$6,000 a year according to industry analysts, just to keep running. Suppose you could set it up so that you could get all of those branches on the same information system, speaking the same language, having updates taken care of for them and replacing those high-maintenance PCs with network “shell” terminals requiring relatively little support.

What would you do?

Which explains why GSS has taken upon itself the large task of becoming its own application service provider (ASP). An ASP uses large servers to provide needed computer programs to far-flung facilities and offices, providing all necessary maintenance, backup and updating, and freeing those facilities to focus on providing service—in this case, resident care—without the burden of keeping their information systems running. According to GSS Chief Information Officer Rustan Williams, the switch has enabled GSS to increase efficiency to the point that the organization’s technical support requires only one-and-a-half



full-time equivalents (FTEs) for more than 2,000 PCs, compared with the industry average of one FTE for every 75 PCs.

For its clinical and accounts receivable software, GSS has selected the Health Care Software (HCS) INTERACTANT programs, which have been designed for use on a high-speed server from IBM (the eServer iSeries, for the technologically literate, which has a reputation for being virtually virus-proof). Consolidating GSS’s mission-critical applications on one server, Williams notes, “is what has made this approach so cost-effective for us.”

Training for the system is Web-based, with modules set up to allow each trainee

to learn interactively at his/her own pace.

Of course, no adaptation of a new technology infrastructure goes seamlessly. GSS has had to work through particular challenges, such as the logging of keystrokes that “slowed everything to a crawl,” says Williams, until GSS was able to localize the function, and the structuring of a “single sign-on” security system that would work efficiently. And commenting on the long-term care industry in general, HCS’s Vice-President of Marketing Tom Fahey adds that for multi-facility long-term care providers, overall technologic improvements are still needed to “consolidate facility information for use in facility, regional and corporate-wide analysis in a real-time environment”—the in-depth reporting function that is a major promise of the ASP approach.

For now, though, both GSS and JHH have made sufficient progress to document the basic value of the new information technology: (with apologies to Hillary Clinton) “it *makes* a village,” no matter how big you might be. ^{NH}

For further information: Kristine Cerchiara, Jewish Home and Hospital (JHH), phone (212) 870-5000; Rustan Williams, The Evangelical Lutheran Good Samaritan Society (GSS), e-mail rwilliam@good-sam.com; Tom Fahey, Health Care Software, Inc. (HCS), phone (800) 524-1038, ext. 326, e-mail tfahey@hcssupport.com or visit www.hcsinteractant.com.

BY RICHARD L. PECK, EDITOR