

CURVATURE & Sisters of Charity Health System

From Edge to Core, Across Multiple Locations:

Sisters of Charity Hospitals Find Budgetary and Network Relief with Curvature's Responsive NetSure® Maintenance and Hybrid Approach

Based in Cleveland, Ohio, The Sisters of Charity Health System was established in 1982 as the parent corporation for the sponsored ministries of the Sisters of Charity of St. Augustine (CSA). In July 2014, *U.S News and World Report* named two hospitals of the Sisters of Charity Health System in its annual “Best Hospitals” ranking. Both Mercy Medical Center and St. John Medical Center were recognized as being among the best for delivering high-performance care in multiple specialties.

Over the decades, the organization has grown by responding to the community needs in Ohio and South Carolina. The Sisters of Charity Health System currently owns four hospitals, two in each of the aforementioned states, along with a joint venture in an Ohio-based medical center. Last year, this required providing more than 170,000 inpatient days, responding to 160,000 emergency department visits and performing 1,000 open-heart surgeries.

According to Paul Jones, CTO for the Sisters of Charity Health System, there is a constant balance to be achieved between offering the best technology support to ensure patient care excellence and containing costs to keep operational expenditures in line with budgetary constraints. “In our world, the goal is to deliver the most technology we can, as cost-effectively as we can,” he explained. “I am always eager to work with technology partners who can help me reduce my cost footprint without compromising on service and support.”

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Solution Snapshot

Customer: The Sisters of Charity Health System, Cleveland
www.sistersofcharityhealth.org

Industry: Healthcare

Challenges:

- Budgetary constraints required a reduction in cost footprint
- 24/7 healthcare environment demanded maximum network reliability
- Aging network created reliability problems leading to outages

Solution:

- Purchased pre-owned networking equipment to reduce costs
- Deployed NetSure maintenance support for network edge and core
- Extended equipment lifecycles with support for previous-generation gear

Benefits:

- Lowered maintenance costs by 40 percent
- Improved responsiveness to expedite problem resolutions
- Extended equipment lifecycle yields hundreds of thousands of dollars in capital expenditures

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- Paul Jones

CTO for the Sisters of Charity Health System

The Challenge

In striving to deliver the very best technology at the best price, the IT department at Sisters of Charity Health System focuses on all facets of communications. A team of 50 infrastructure specialists oversees everything from traditional networking and telephone systems to seamless access to Meditech electronic health records. In addition, The Sisters of Charity Health System is constantly addressing the growing need to provide physicians, patients, staffers and hospital visitors with varying degrees of wireless access on mobile devices.

The IT team's mission is to maintain maximum availability of the organization's primarily Cisco-driven network. The Sisters of Charity Health System's network connects 7,600 professionals, including 2,200 credentialed physicians across five main medical facilities and additional remote, physicians', occupational medicine and ambulatory sites. In its 24/7 environment with no tolerance for downtime, Sisters of Charity Health System maintains a fully redundant network to safeguard mission-critical systems and electronic medical records from system failures.

Balancing the need for highly reliable networking with the high cost of maintaining a Cisco environment became increasingly challenging as budgetary considerations became a top business priority. "One of my missions when I joined was to identify ways to reduce costs," Jones said. "This meant finding an alternative procurement vendor for Cisco

gear as well as other, less costly options for Cisco SMARTnet maintenance."

Additionally, the ability to ensure maximum network uptime increasingly became a challenge as the organization's aging network began to experience intermittent unreliability. "We started having problems with network stability and were becoming worried that a major outage could bring down the network and create a major problem for us," Jones said.

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- Paul Jones

CTO for the Sisters of Charity Health System

The Solution

As part of the organization's quest to contain costs, Jones sought alternative procurement options, including providers of previous-generation Cisco gear. "We don't always need the latest and greatest; it's more important that we find equipment that is effective in meeting our needs," commented Jones. "We could really optimize our budget by attaining previous-gen equipment where applicable."

As the world's leading provider of pre-owned and new-surplus Cisco networking equipment, Curvature initially emerged as a viable, alternative procurement source. After completing several successful equipment purchases, Jones took a closer look at Curvature's NetSure offering. An alternative to Cisco SMARTnet maintenance, the complete, third-party solution would enable Sisters of Charity Health System to maintain its infrastructure and refresh cycles on its own timetable. This made NetSure an appealing choice.

Since Jones hadn't used third-party maintenance previously,

however, he began cautiously. He recommended that Sisters of Charity Health System purchase NetSure to support switches at the edge of the network. Building on that success, the IT team soon began transitioning other SMARTnet maintenance contracts to NetSure. “We really got to know the Curvature support engineers, and they are really sharp,” added Jones. “Not only did they know their stuff, they were very responsive, so we moved more and more of our core network equipment over to NetSure.”

Having Curvature as part of its extended support team really paid off for Sisters of Charity when a serious outage knocked out the network and phones at one of its hospitals in South Carolina. After putting out a call for help to its OEM and Curvature teams, Sisters of Charity received a prompt response from the NetSure engineers who went to great lengths to research the problem, including mocking up the Sisters of Charity network at a Curvature facility to expedite the resolution. “It was absolutely incredible that Curvature went to such lengths to figure out our issues and then walk us through remediating them to fix the problem,” said Jones.

Once the network was up and running, Curvature suggested a series of changes to restore stability as well as longer-term recommendations for a complete network redesign. “I was totally impressed by Curvature,” Jones noted. “They quickly figured out what went wrong, replicated the problem in their lab and then tested the solution to make sure it would work.”

The Benefits

In short order, Curvature has become a trusted partner to Sisters of Charity, which now relies on NetSure for the majority of its maintenance requirements. The benefits include 24x7 guaranteed hardware replacement for all network elements that do not require OEM software updates.

“Curvature recommended that we keep SMARTnet on our ASA environment because of all the software updates,” explained Jones. “To me, that’s a sign of a good vendor partnership when they are willing to turn away business in order for the customer to do the right thing.” As a result, Sisters of Charity has been embracing a hybrid services model where Cisco SMARTnet is used when software updates are needed, and NetSure covers

everything else in the network core and edge. The savings have been impressive—up to 40 percent over what the organization was paying on its previous SMARTnet contracts.

“Curvature enables us to bend the cost curve,” Jones explained. “When Cisco gives you a support quote, you’re charged as though you have every feature and card in the box. Not so with Curvature. If you only have two cards in the box, you only pay for that.”

Another way that Curvature helps Sisters of Charity bend the cost curve is by extending equipment lifecycles and upgrading only when needed and not by the OEM’s directive. “By extending the useful life of our previous-generation Nexus equipment, which Curvature supports, we saved hundreds of thousands of dollars,” added Jones.

Aside from the major cost savings, Sisters of Charity applauds Curvature’s responsive, expert technical guidance. “We had a main chassis go out at one of our hospitals,” recalled Jones. “We put in a ticket with Curvature at 4:00 in the afternoon and by 8:00 the next morning, there’s a replacement at the receiving dock. Curvature’s responsiveness has exceeded our expectations.”

Accessibility is a big deal to Sisters of Charity as getting timely responses from OEM support can be an ongoing challenge. “Getting people to listen and respond to your questions and concerns is not that easy when you’re dealing with major OEMs,” concluded Jones. “While our CIO was skeptical at first, she soon saw the value of working with Curvature as the team isn’t trying to sell us like the OEM—they’re on our side of the fence trying to do what’s best for us and it shows.”

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