

The Juniper Networks NetScreen SSL VPN Provides Critical Medical Information Access — Any Time, Anywhere

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Customer:

Catholic Health System, healthcare provider to hundreds of thousands of Western New Yorkers

Industry:

Healthcare

Challenge:

Install a secure remote access infrastructure that connects the disparate networks of multiple hospitals

Solution:

Juniper Networks NetScreen SSL VPN solution

Benefits:

- Anywhere, anytime access to patient information
- Saved time and money because of Juniper Networks ease-of-use
- HIPAA compliance

“Now doctors can get patient information such as lab results at any time from anywhere, without having to come all the way into the hospital to look at the results.”

Doug Torre

Catholic Health System
Director of Networking and Technical Services

One of the two largest providers of healthcare in Western New York, the Catholic Health System’s 8,000 employees and 1,200 physicians are part of a healing ministry dating back more than 150 years. Its facilities are known for excellence in such areas as women’s, cancer, cardiology and rehabilitative services. The Catholic Health System (CHS) is one of the largest providers of cardiology services and the leading provider of maternity services and care to the elderly in Western New York.

CHS has four acute care hospitals in Buffalo, New York, and a network serving 8,000 total employees. Two of the hospitals run a patient information and billing system that is different from the others. For those two hospitals, patient and hospital information is stored centrally on a mainframe server host located in Melvern, Pennsylvania. T1 lines connect the remote hospitals, and information is supposed to be shared through a Siemens NetAccess application.

Because of the different systems and different IP addressing schemes, sharing the patient data among all four geographically separate sites has been difficult. This caused problems because doctors need 24-hour access to key patient information, such as records and lab results.

In addition to the connectivity challenges, a previous remote access virtual private network (VPN) solution required client software downloads, and installation posed problems.

“The doctors didn’t want to deal with the client software. Most who tried to install the software clients themselves installed them improperly,” said Doug Torre, Director of Networking and Technical Services for Catholic Health System. “The challenge with home support is that we clearly can’t be there at the home to help. Every PC may have different configurations that can add to the challenge of a streamlined support methodology.”



The Solution

CHS recently purchased a Secure Sockets Layer-based (SSL) VPN appliance from Juniper Networks to solve the access problems. The SSL VPN-based hardened network appliance provides the benefits of traditional remote access technologies, such as remote access VPNs and extranets, in a more secure, cost-effective manner. The SSL VPN appliance delivers secure access to networked applications and information over the Internet to any device with a Web browser, without requiring client software downloads or installation, changes to the internal servers, or constant ongoing client maintenance—a particular benefit in a healthcare environment where IT staff time is at a premium. The SSL VPN solution also provides strong authorization and authentication to ensure security both inside and outside the organization.

Torre said he plans to roll out physician NetAccess using the SSL VPN solution to more than 500 doctors. Today, they have rolled out SSL VPN access to their Siemens NetAccess, Tele-Cardiology and Fetal Monitoring applications. He said future plans call for CHS to investigate deploying a centralized longitudinal clinical record (LCR) repository, and he knows the LCR technology will need to be readily accessible to users, all made possible via the SSL VPN.

Chuck Simet, CHS Network Engineer, said he was attracted to the Juniper Networks SSL VPN appliance because of its ease of use and lack of client-side downloads or requirements. In addition, the SSL VPN appliance supports all major forms of authentication, including RSA SecurID. Access to resources can be set by an individual user or by a user group and can be allowed or denied all the way to the file or URL level.

The Benefits

The Juniper Networks NetScreen SSL VPN solution has allowed Torre, his staff and the practitioner community, to recognize all the benefits of a program he calls “physician NetAccess” at CHS. The Siemens NetAccess application is now accessible by doctors via any Web browser, regardless of location. “Doctors can get patient information such as lab results at any time from anywhere, without having to come all the way into the hospital to look at the results,” Simet said.

Simet added that the SSL VPN solution was easy to set up and was up and running in 30 minutes.

“We tell the doctors to bookmark a URL and they are connected to NetAccess—it’s that easy,” said Simet. “The SSL VPN appliance has saved significant time for the IS staff and doctors, too.”

While providing easy remote access, the SSL VPN solution helps CHS meet Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) compliance requirements. One of the major attractions for using the Juniper Networks NetScreen SSL VPN appliance was the highly encrypted connections it provides and its ability to plug in with the RSA three-tier authentication mechanism used at CHS.

“We believe the SSL VPN solution gives us a strong position for meeting the proposed HIPAA guidelines,” said Torre. “Compliance with the standards requires a combination of technology, strategy, products and policies, to name a few necessities. The Juniper Networks SSL VPN solution is one good tool to get us there.”



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