



## Using communication tools to improve patient care and flow

### Staying connected for better response to emergencies

You probably wouldn't be surprised that a hospital located in Oklahoma's Tornado Alley makes emergency preparedness a high priority. Duncan Regional Hospital, in southwestern Oklahoma, needs to be prepared for tornadoes, ice storms, and wildfires that sweep across the prairie and farmland that surround the small town of Duncan.

But you also wouldn't mistake Duncan Regional Hospital for a typical rural hospital. While they've retained the high-touch practice of making sure every phone call is answered by a live voice, they've also reinforced their commitment to efficient communication by using technological solutions to stay connected.

### Communication for emergency management and beyond

Several years ago, Patty Winger, MS, RN, CEN, Emergency Preparedness Coordinator and Cardiac Rehab Nurse for Duncan Regional, knew that the hospital needed to upgrade its communication system for emergencies. Training drills demonstrated that their system for manually contacting key personnel took far too long.

*"LiveProcess really speeds up the response, so we can provide quality, compassionate care to our patients."*

Michael Turner  
PBX Supervisor

## DUNCAN REGIONAL HOSPITAL

- 138-bed acute care hospital serving Stephens County, OK, and the surrounding area
- A charitable, not-for-profit, wholly self-owned independent hospital
- 10-time recognition on Health Care's Most Wired hospitals list
- A Level III regional hospital for trauma and emergency services, with 11 affiliated clinics and a Level IV critical-access rural hospital

### Goals and Needs

- Notify staff and other key stakeholders faster and more efficiently during emergencies
- Replace an outdated system of physician notification with a more effective method
- Reduce and simplify the workload of PBX operators
- Stay current and agile with flexible, up-to-date communication technology

“The disaster was in our backyard before we could even get off the call tree,” Winger recalled. When she saw a demonstration of LiveProcess and its communication and emergency management capabilities, she was thrilled to bring the solution back to hospital administrators.

When LiveProcess came to demonstrate LiveProcess Emergency Manager in the hospital, however, the administrators saw something different. After a review of all of its features, they found an answer to an entirely different problem: physician paging.

Before LiveProcess, all physician paging and telephone answering services went through the main switchboard, which could easily overwhelm the PBX staff. “We began using LiveProcess for physician paging and mass notifications, and since then we’ve only grown in how we use it,” said Winger.

### **Multiple communication options promote responsiveness**

Over a period of one to two years, Duncan eliminated all the pagers in use by physicians. By doing so they realized a savings of over \$14,000 per year, but more importantly they moved physicians to a method of communication and collaboration that better served the doctors themselves, hospital staff and patients.

Using LiveProcess allowed Duncan Regional to offer physicians multiple choices in how they could be contacted, including mobile phones, landlines, email or all of the above. And with the built-in response mechanisms, coordination was streamlined and improved.

“With its programmed messaging, response and tracking capabilities, LiveProcess put process around communication and created more structure around how we respond to clinical events,” said Michael Turner, Duncan’s PBX supervisor.

As with any change, Duncan Regional faced some resistance when asking folks to give up their pagers, but soon physicians were fully on board and using the new tool enthusiastically. “When I do my communication drills, I warn the rest of the staff that physicians have some of the best response rates,” Winger noted.

### **Reducing overhead paging keeps the peace**

Too many overhead pages can make a hospital stressful for patients and their visitors, and can even interfere with effective communication among staff. Over time, physicians and other staff may learn to tune out frequent overhead calls so they can focus on their work.

At Duncan Regional, overhead call still has an important role, especially in emergencies. But when used in tandem with LiveProcess, the two modes of communication back each other up. For example, when a hospitalist is catching a quick rest at 3 a.m., she may not hear the overhead, but she will hear her own phone. If someone runs outside to the parking lot, the PBX operator can still track them down with a mobile notification.

### **Preloaded contact groups simplify communication**

Before LiveProcess, certain codes had been designated call-only to ensure that the message got through. Even if a code required calling only five or 10 people, those calls could take valuable time. Dialing each number, waiting for a response and delivering the message to each individual separately was a slow process.

With LiveProcess all the contact information is preloaded into the system. “Now it takes less than a minute to get the job taken care of,” said Turner. “When you are dealing with patients’ lives, time is everything.”

One of the most useful tools for coordination has been the customized contact groups Duncan Regional has set up within LiveProcess. At last count, the hospital had 69 distinct groups set up and ready to reach at a moment’s notice. Most of the groups are based on hospital departments, as well as their clinics and the separate Jefferson County Hospital.

Other groups are more specialized. A group for leadership allows the executive team to be summoned quickly for a briefing. Another group includes all of Duncan Regional’s external emergency management partners, including fire, police and the health department. All told, that group has 27 separate contacts, each of which needs to be kept aware of what is going on at the hospital during an emergency.

“Now we don’t have to spend time calling 27 different people,” said Wininger. “That has been a real plus in terms of efficiency and coordinating an effective response.”

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Patty Wininger  
Emergency Preparedness Coordinator

## **Customized codes allow fast responses**

The hospital has codes for various emergencies, such as fire, tornado, evacuation or active shooter. The messages for these types of emergencies are already preloaded, so the PBX operator need only push a button to get the message out to everyone. Adding custom information, for example the time of expiration for a tornado watch or warning, can be done easily.

Duncan Regional has also created specific medical codes to alert designated groups about acute conditions, such as stroke, heart attack or sepsis. Should a septic patient arrive in the ER, or if a patient becomes septic while in the hospital, a quick message alerts a fast team for sepsis, automatically coordinates the response, and allows them to intervene quickly before the patient's condition deteriorates.

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## **Tracking and documentation ensures accountability**

Manual calling leaves more room for error and uncertainty. The response and tracking function in LiveProcess helps provide accountability. For example, a physician may be out of range or may for some other reason not receive—or recall receiving—a message. Automatic tracking records when the message was sent, so there's no question about whether an operator followed through.

In addition to documenting the operator sent a message, LiveProcess tracks what happens to it on the recipient's end. Did it go through, and if so, did someone return a response? This level of detail helps pinpoint the cause of errors.

At Duncan Regional, Craig Lovett, IT Communications Technician, uses errors in the log to keep the system up to date. The records allow him to spot messages that didn't go through and drill down to the cause. "It has been incredibly helpful to be able to go back through and clean up and make sure everybody's numbers are correct and everybody has the right contact information," he added.

*"Being wired for communication is continuing to be the wave of the future."*

Patty Winger  
Emergency Preparedness Coordinator

## **Intuitive use makes implementation easy**

Setting up LiveProcess was quick and easy, according to Lovett. Batch uploads of names and contacts from existing sources, like human resources software, made getting started simple.

For most updates, Duncan Regional uses the automated contact self-maintenance (ACSM) feature in LiveProcess, which allows individuals to provide current information and preference for mode of contact. If an individual contact needs to update but ignores multiple ACSM reminders, administrators will get a notice so they can reach out to a specific person. Those reminders help ensure the chain of communication isn't broken.

When new PBX operators join the team, training on LiveProcess takes little time. Turner reports that new operators can be trained on LiveProcess in one day. "LiveProcess is a very simple tool to use—if you can't use it, something is wrong," Turner added. Physicians and other staff learn about LiveProcess during initial orientation, but otherwise need no specific training to use the solution.

Duncan Regional has also found that LiveProcess is there to help after the rollout. "Every time we've had any questions or concerns, LiveProcess thoroughly checks everything out and addresses them, and is genuinely invested in helping us get done what we need to do," said Lovett.

## **Expanding the use of LiveProcess to everyday communications**

Emergency management and physician paging were the primary reasons Duncan Regional Hospital chose to bring on LiveProcess, but they've adapted it to other uses as well.

After-hours and weekend requests for IT assistance are routed through LiveProcess to the IT team member on call. Similarly, the PBX operators use LiveProcess to help meet the needs of home care or hospice patients. For example, if a patient reports he is running low on oxygen over the weekend, the hospital operator can use LiveProcess to alert the on-call durable medical technician and coordinate a delivery.

"LiveProcess really speeds up the response, so we can provide quality, compassionate care to our patients," said Turner.

Other options Duncan Regional is exploring include using LiveProcess for coordinating nursing shifts and expanding the use of LiveProcess in their smaller, more rural hospital. Because Jefferson County Hospital is a much smaller facility, their needs for distinct codes and groups are different. "I can tweak LiveProcess to make it fit their needs," said Lovett, "so it's nice that the software is so flexible."

## **LiveProcess for day-to-day operations**

Duncan Regional Hospital has taken advantage of several LiveProcess functions to make everyday hospital operations go more smoothly. Other ways hospitals can use LiveProcess include:

- Mobilizing staff and vendors for both urgent and routine repairs
- Coordinating patient discharge
- Dispatching security
- Alerting staff to prepare for incoming trauma patients

Duncan Regional's emphasis on communication has also helped them to be ready for the updated CMS emergency preparedness rule, which takes effect in November 2017. With the groundwork already built for collaboration, they are equipped to provide the continuity of care the new rule is aiming for.

A big part of that preparation is looking ahead to the solutions that will meet the challenges of tomorrow as well as today. "Being wired for multi-way communication and coordination is continuing to be the wave of the future," said Wininger. "I have seen that grow in leaps and bounds."

### **For more information**

**888.400.2673**  
**sales@liveprocess.com**  
**www.liveprocess.com**

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