Technology
In Our Lives

Mission-Critical: Technology Helps Nation's Largest Organ And Tissue Bank Save And Enhance Lives

(NAPSA)—Technology can seem so commonplace sometimes it's easy to forget how many crucial services depend on it. Virginia Beach, Va.-based LifeNet (http://www.lifenet.org), the nation's largest nonprofit, full-service organ donation agency and tissue banking system, is one example of the necessity of choosing the right IT products and services mix, in its case to support a mission-critical function: saving and improving lives.

Each day, LifeNet receives notice via its donor call centers of approximately 12 to 15 newly deceased individuals across the U.S. identified as donors. Given that one person can save seven lives through organ donation and impact more than 50 others with tissue transplants, it is crucial to accurately track data and effectively communicate with a broad network of field staff, medical institutions, transportation companies and others to ensure the process goes smoothly. All told, the work of LifeNet's staff affects thousands of lives each year.

A Delicate Balance

When considerations of "human resources" relate to actual, life-giving organs and tissues, the familiar business technology concept of downtime gains a whole new meaning. Even with the company's patented profusion pumps in place to help preserve organ viability, some tissues live a mere four hours outside the body, requiring LifeNet to meet exceedingly tight deadlines. While field staff rushes to the hospital to work with family members and procure tissues, others must find suitable matches and ensure that operating rooms and transplant surgeons are standing by.

Once tissue is recovered, activities such as precise inventory management and tracking, and coordination of quick and accurate delivery, are crucial. Recovered tissue is processed at LifeNet's headquarters, then distributed across the country for procedures, which can include knee and limb replacements, spinal fusions, heart valve replacements and countless others.

Life-Enabling IT Processes

According to Steve Lenz, vice president of Information Systems for LifeNet, "It's all about the ability of our staff to access each other and accurate data, anywhere, anytime. So much of what we do is basic communication, which seems simple on the surface. What goes on behind the scenes is another story."

LifeNet chose a solution leveraging Microsoft Dynamics GP and other key, familiar Microsoft products, allowing the organization to seamlessly track the intake, classification and distribution of organs and tissues from its headquarters and five remote locations —all processes that were previously scattered across multiple systems. The new integrated system can be accessed via both centralized and Web-based tools, and also interfaces with messaging technology to be accessed by field staff across the U.S. via PDA devices. The new streamlined process has also freed some of LifeNet's administrative staff to focus on other core activities.

Donation Education

According to the United Network for Organ Sharing (UNOS), more than 92,000 Americans currently await a lifesaving organ transplant, and tens of thousands more each year require a tissue transplant. Thus, educating the public about the importance of donation is also integral to LifeNet's mission. Technology is central to this outreach as well, via the organization's national donor education Web site, http://www.lifenet.org, which includes links for donor sign-up around the U.S., as well as http://www.save7lives.org, a Web site aimed at recruiting donors in LifeNet's home state of Virginia.

A New Take on ROI

Clearly, technology infrastructure is just one piece of the process that allows LifeNet to perform its critical public service, as well it should be. Technology should work for businesses, not the other way around. All types of businesses and service organizations are getting smart about what a truly integrated technology platform can do to free them to focus on what they do best.

Said Lenz, "So much of what we can see and do is new. We've never had many of these capabilities before. I don't think we could possibly overestimate the impact of what that means, when you consider how many lives can be touched by the work we do every day."

Now that's what I'd call a good return on investment.

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