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NHS Borders

Customer Profile

The NHS Borders cover a large rural area in Southern Scotland. The Trust is centred on Borders General Hospital, Roxburghshire, which employs over 1,000 people and serves as a community hospital for the central Borders, with a catchment of some 100,000 residents. It acts as a secondary referral and teaching hospital within a network of rural Community Hospitals and General Practice (GP) surgeries completing a geographically dispersed, healthcare infrastructure. In the last year NHS Borders saw over 20,000 inpatient episodes and treated nearly 7,000 patients. Borders General Hospital and the Community Hospitals maintain as much as 94% bed occupancy.

In Partnership with Scottish Borders Council, Public Governance Committee and the Clinical Governance Committee, NHS Borders is committed to patient safety and patient experience, providing regular and timely reporting. Such reporting is now an expectation of the Scottish Government given the development of Local Delivery Plans, and so demands continuous monitoring of performance as a key element in identifying risks affecting Health Service delivery to the people of the Borders region.

Operational and patient data, therefore, forms a crucial element in the daily running of the trust and in the ongoing process of review.

The Challenge

NHS Borders faced the dual issue of working with legacy systems on a scattered network with poor options for disaster recovery. Isla Forsyth, Systems Engineer, NHS Borders

explained that, "There are over 20 General Practices scattered across the region, each with a small server on site which were using VERITAS Backup Exec but these backups were continually failing.

To further complicate matters, each GP server had its own tape drive, with the GPs sending in a tape once per month to bring data onto another server. However NHS Borders would experience constant tape and tape drive failure, therefore requiring Systems Team support almost daily. As most sites had three or four servers, there was always tape drives needing replaced.

Using infrastructure that operated with individual tape drives on each server was, "Quite horrible", admits Forsyth. NHS Borders, therefore, sought to remove the tapes and create a central place for backup.

The Solution

Iain Allan, Systems Team Leader and his team began comparing the latest versions of VERITAS Net Backup, IBM Tivoli and, through reseller Capito, were introduced to CommVault® Simpana® software. Finding CommVault software easier to use and implement, NHS Borders immediately adopted the Simpana product to manage critical backup and recovery. Despite the amount of legacy equipment, CommVault engineers rapidly addressed what few issues arose during deployment and established the current management protocols for centralised backup.

Today NHS Borders operates two NAS boxes, "Fondly known as Wee NAS, and Big NAS," laughs Forsyth. The NAS boxes currently

handle a terabyte and six terabytes of data respectively, backing up to tape. The usual demand from GPs is to backup to the NAS with one major file per week on this system, with data saved for three weeks before being overwritten. The Systems Team conduct incremental backups daily through the working week, with a full backup taking place each Friday.

Now, all data backup is held on a centralised tape drive, with a single daily report provided by CommVault to monitor the status of backups across the entire NHS Borders network. "We feel better knowing we now have a centralised copy," continued Forsyth. "It has made management of what was a complex enterprise backup job much simpler."

The Systems Team still checks the system every day, but with centralised management and reporting now available it has become a simple process of advising GP practices on the rare occasion of a backup not working. The GPs now know that the engineers are controlling the backup process, meaning their time is left to focus on patient care.

Recovery and restores are usually needed once a week. This is usually the result of an accidental file delete by users, but again is no longer a major issue, as files can be recovered in a matter of minutes. "This makes my job so much easier, because now everyone knows that they can get the support," said Forsyth. Restores are also much quicker and, as a result, there is a new level confidence in the system.

NHS Borders' primary focus has been on solving the long-term issues of a scattered IT storage infrastructure and the backup and recovery issues that it created. With this now solved, the team is looking forward to identify the opportunities from using the unified data management tool for additional tasks. "Deduplication is definitely high on the agenda," concluded Forsyth. "That will cut down on so much of our data storage and we know CommVault is ready and able to help with any of our system issues."

