

Sumter Regional Hospital Depends on SouthernLINC Wireless for Disaster Response and Future of Hospital

Overview

Over the last 50 years, Sumter Regional Hospital in Americus, Ga., has grown from an eight-bed neighborhood hospital to a 143-bed acute care facility with more than 50 active medical staff members representing approximately 25 specialties. Sumter Regional Hospital always services its patients with updated equipment, healthcare tools and technology; and that didn't change when a disastrous tornado swept through the region in March 2007.

For Sumter Regional Hospital, communicating instantly has always been one of the most critical components of day-to-day operations. After the tornado ripped through the area and nearly destroyed the hospital, the need for instant communication was amplified.

Immediately, Georgia Emergency Management Agency (GEMA), a nationally accredited emergency management program, provided disaster area support by stabilizing the situation. In order to work more efficiently and coordinate the several other recovery team activities, GEMA recommended that Sumter Regional Hospital receive more than 100 SouthernLINC Wireless phones. Instant communication provided the foundation for the recovery and renewal of Sumter Regional Hospital.

“When caring for patients, employees and volunteers after a disaster, instant communication is most important,” said Lynwood McClung, emergency preparedness coordinator for Sumter Regional Hospital. “By using SouthernLINC Wireless’ Push to Talk service, our emergency preparedness team could immediately and precisely receive and distribute crucial information to or from individuals or groups of people right away. SouthernLINC Wireless took care of us during this incredible crisis.”

Challenge

The tornado whipped through the hospital property at 9 p.m., shredding parts of the facility, blowing out windows, and shearing the building entrance. Sumter Regional Hospital's doctors and medical staff were immediately challenged with treating and evacuating more than 50 patients, three in critical condition, and communicating with their 700-plus employees.

Georgia Emergency Management Agency (GEMA) helped the hospital set up a 50-bed “field hospital” for urgent care in the hospital's parking lot; however, the more than 200 healthcare and clean-up volunteers needed a way to communicate with Sumter Regional Hospital and GEMA staff. The temporary hospital also needed a telecommunications structure, as no landlines were available.

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SUMTER REGIONAL HOSPITAL

Category: Health Care

Instant Disaster Response – Sumter Regional Hospital Teams with SouthernLINC Wireless to Restore and Recover

CHALLENGE

Following a tornado that swept through Americus, Ga., and directly through Sumter Regional Hospital, the medical staff and emergency response team needed a way to instantly communicate to all employees, regional hospitals and emergency response officials.

SOLUTION

Since SouthernLINC Wireless has built in redundancies, power back-ups and security features designed to deliver reliable communications, Sumter Regional Hospital was able to depend on the company's cellular and Push to Talk service for day-to-day and emergency communications.

RESULT

Sumter Regional Hospital medical staffs, volunteers and emergency response team were able to communicate with each other—quickly and efficiently – using more than 100 of SouthernLINC Wireless’ Push to Talk enabled phones.

BENEFITS

The immediate access to employees, handset reliability and network privacy allowed Sumter Regional Hospital and its patients to coordinate efforts in the aftermath of the disaster. During recovery and sustainability efforts, continued wireless service allows the hospital the portability it needs while departments are scattered throughout the community.

Solution

Sumter Regional Hospital's emergency preparedness team used SouthernLINC Wireless' cellular handsets with Push to Talk to communicate with the local fire departments, Department of Public Health, regional hospitals, Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and GEMA – instantly and effectively.

After GEMA set up the 50-bed field hospital, staff members still had no way of communicating internally because temporary landlines could not be constructed in the parking lot. Sumter Regional Hospital used SouthernLINC Wireless for two months after the tornado for portable emergency and day-to-day communication in the field hospital. As a result, the emergency room could order lab work and x-rays, as well as communicate with different departments housed in temporary satellite offices.

“Medical information is very private,” McClung explained. “We could not have used regular two-way radios to communicate this type of information.”

Since its inception, SouthernLINC Wireless has built in redundancies, power back-ups and security features designed to deliver reliable communications even during the worst weather conditions. For Sumter Regional Hospital, this was one of the primary benefits, considering it needed a dependable means of communication during emergencies

Benefits

McClung pointed to three areas where Sumter Regional Hospital relies heavily on the SouthernLINC Wireless network:

- *Instant communication:* “Our emergency room staff consistently needs the quickest and most technologically savvy communications tools to solve medical emergencies everyday. The need is even more imminent when there’s an unexpected operational and structural emergency of this magnitude. Push to Talk was the instant solution that we needed.”
- *Reliability:* “SouthernLINC Wireless was the only wireless service provider that we could depend on after the tornado. SouthernLINC Wireless became a necessity to us that night and for the ongoing recovery of our hospital.”
- *Network:* “Directly after the tornado, we needed to talk to other regional hospitals to transfer patients and to large groups of volunteers, FEMA and GEMA team to coordinate recovery efforts. When we use SouthernLINC Wireless, we know we can contact several people at once. This helps us address our emergency more efficiently and keeps communications streamlined.”

“I can honestly say that if we didn’t use SouthernLINC wireless during this emergency response, communication would have been very challenging to say the least,” McClung added.



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