

# THE ENDURING VALUE OF PAGING IN HEALTHCARE



## MEMORIAL SLOAN KETTERING CANCER CENTER

**Challenge:** Communicate PHI securely and reliably

**Result:** Protected patient information across 2,800 encrypted Spok® pagers

In her 27 years as an employee of Manhattan-based Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center, senior manager of telecom operations Pat Black has seen pagers lend their pocket-sized power to situations of all types. From the dark, gut-wrenching days surrounding 9/11 to the everyday discussions essential to coordinating top-notch patient care, hospital staff fully depend on their Spok® wide-area pagers for reliable communications.

Three years ago, during a routine network check, the IT staff realized some of the organization's pages had been intercepted. "Spok suggested we look at encrypted paging to tighten security protocols," Black said. "It took just a few weeks to switch to fully encrypted pagers."

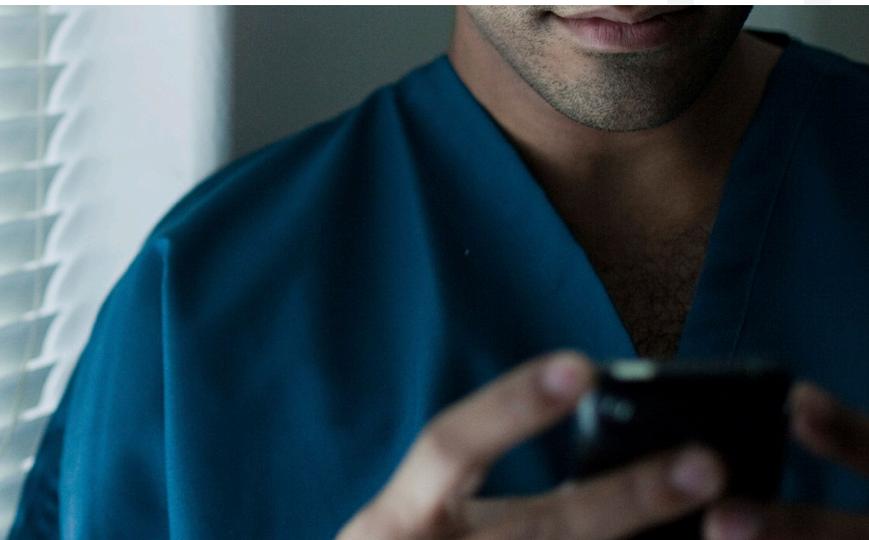
The teaching hospital now has 2,800+ Spok® T5 encrypted wide-area pagers in the hands of physicians, nurses, and technical support staff. "Before the encrypted pagers, we couldn't send any message that included PHI, such as a patient's critical values," Black said. Today, clinical staff are confident the new level of security effectively protects sensitive information.

The 473-bed, world-renowned facility has a fully integrated healthcare communication platform from Spok to support its staff and patients. The Memorial Sloan Kettering team complements their wide-area paging with an onsite paging system used for fire and medical codes. They send 500,000 pages a year through their Spok operator console, a key element of the Spok Care Connect® platform that also houses the web directory, on-call scheduling, and emergency notification capabilities. Black requests that everyone on hospital incident command system (HICS) teams carry Spok pagers to enable fast response.

For Black, reliance on cell phones alone just isn't an option, a lesson learned years ago during 9/11 that is still relevant today. "The cell towers were taken over by police and firemen working to save lives," she recalled. "We had no access to cell service and even our phone system was affected with the call volumes. Paging was the only way to communicate. We will always need to have paging along with cell phones."

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Pat Black  
Senior Manager of Telecom Operations



## CASE STUDIES

### SENTARA HEALTHCARE

**Challenge:** Support business continuity and consistent patient response

**Result:** Streamlined code calls and prepared for the unexpected

Deb Larson and Stephanie Koogler are on a mission. As communications managers of IT at Sentara Healthcare, they are part of the team laying the groundwork for a consolidated communication center, which along with Spok wide-area paging, is a fundamental element of the organization's business continuity efforts. Because Sentara spans 12 acute care hospitals and 100+ care sites in Virginia and North Carolina, this is no small task.

"Our goal is to provide the same high level of service to all patients and callers," Koogler said. Part of this means having consistent response processes for codes and other situations that require fast action. "Sentara physicians carry pagers, as do cath team members and everyone with leadership responsibilities," Larson added.

Via Spok, Sentara sends more than 375,000 messages each month to alert pre-defined groups of emergent events such as traumas, code blues, strokes, and code STEMIs (ST elevation myocardial infarctions). In addition to its Spok paging, the organization relies on Spok Care Connect® for its operator console and web directory, as well as Spok Mobile® for secure smartphone messaging.

Sentara will continue to refine its business continuity policies as it welcomes new facilities into the fold. Spok paging will be a key part of these plans, which also span backup servers, generators, and emergency phones. "People love their cell phones, but cell and Wi-Fi coverage can be an issue. Paging provides an effective backup," Larson said.

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Deb Larson  
Communications Manager of IT

