CASE STUDY

Reseller:
Biometrics Direct

SAFLINK Solution:
SAFsolution® Enterprise Edition software for Windows®

Biometric Technology:

Panasonic Authenticam™ iris scanner

ComputerProx™ TF-2000

Iris Scans Replace Passwords to Ease Clinician Access & Facilitate HIPAA Compliance

Biometric authentication solution meets North Florida Medical Centers' HIPAA compliance requirements

Introduction

New regulations for safeguarding sensitive patient information mandated by the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA) have required healthcare facilities to look for better ways to tighten access to hospital networks. At the same time, many hospitals are also looking for ways to stem soaring overhead costs without sacrificing the quality of patient care and employee/physician goodwill. On the surface, these goals seem mutually exclusive. However, an emerging technology known as biometric authentication is enabling healthcare organizations to:

- Meet HIPAA requirements for Access Control, Audit Controls, Data Authentication, and Entity Authentication
- Dramatically increase network and physical security with one affordable integrated solution
- Eliminate passwords, making access far more convenient for clinicians
- Receive a rapid return on investment

This case study will look at how a leading healthcare company realized many of these benefits through a recent security deployment.

Satellite clinics present network security challenges

North Florida Medical Centers, Inc. (NFMC) is a not-for-profit healthcare system located in Tallahassee, Florida. NFMC is a network of seven satellite clinics situated in rural areas in a radius of up to 100 miles from the corporate headquarters. The clinics serve 17,000 patients with up to 60,000 encounters annually.

Due to the distance between the corporate headquarters and the clinics, network maintenance and the system for assigning passwords for network access was becoming an administrative nightmare. The new HIPAA security standards gave NFMC the opportunity to find a technology that not only eliminates password maintenance requirements, but would also ensure that medical records are viewed only by authorized users, helping to maintain HIPAA compliance.

Early on, it became clear that improvements in today's biometric log-on technology made it a viable option for replacing alphanumeric passwords. NFMC's criteria for selecting a product was straightforward:

- it needed to function on a network
- it had to operate in a Windows® environment
- it must be easy to manage
- it had to provide self-enrollment, due to the decentralized nature of the hospital campuses

Biometrics as a security solution

NFMC had three goals for its network security system upgrade: 1) to meet HIPAA regulations by better controlling access to patient data and medical records; 2) to reassure patients that their medical data is secure; and 3) to improve the level of IT support and communication with end-users.

NFMC initially looked at fingerprint scanning as the core methodology for its security system. However, clinicians and attending staff at NFMC were constantly using lotion on their hands. During the testing phase, NFMC found that even the best scanning hardware needed maintenance to keep it free of lotion residue. This wouldn't have been a problem if NFMC was a centralized hospital. However, with a distributed clinic system and no assistance available full-time at most sites, this presented a maintenance challenge.

SAFLINK Corporation, in conjunction with its reseller, Biometrics Direct, presented one of the most compelling end-to-end security solutions. It offered a flexible platform that would integrate with NFMC's existing network architecture for ease of management and auditing, while utilizing iris scanning technology for end-user convenience. The winning combination of products included SAFLINK's SAFsolution® Enterprise Edition software for Windows®, Panasonic Authenticam™ iris scanners, and the Computer-Prox™ TF-2000 proximity sensor, which automatically locks a workstation when the user walks away.

SAFLINK's solution easily met the NFMC's first two goals; communicating how the new technology would help everyone do their jobs faster and more efficiently was part of the rollout process for the MIS department.

NFMC began the rollout in December 2002. The equipment deployment had minimal problems, with the most time-consuming element being end-user training. NFMC found that clinical support staff needed a basic primer on iris scans, which demonstrated how to enroll in the system and how to obtain a good scan. It was also important to communicate to users that the system would protect their privacy, be harmless to their eyes, and work for people wearing glasses, contacts, or goggles.

The Future of Biometrics at NFMC

The early feedback on the new security system is overwhelmingly positive. The staff appreciates the ability to log on to their workstations and the hospital network without having to remember a password. The MIS department has already begun to realize a return on investment now that the need for password support has been eliminated, and users were able to enroll their biometric by themselves – thanks to the self-enrollment wizard provided by SAFsolution®. In fact, the system has been so effective, the MIS department plans to rollout the same solution to its corporate offices. By the end of 2004, every PC in the NFMC network will have a biometric authentication component.

Over the last three to four years, NFMC has seen many technological transitions. Deploying a system that uses biometrics as the primary security component for its network has been one of the smoothest—if not successful—projects in its history.

"We are very pro-technology – if there is a product out there that can help us do our jobs better by delivering information faster or in a more secure environment, then we want to use it," said Lynn Sims, MIS director at NFMC. "When we started looking for a network security solution that complied with HIPAA regulations, we quickly realized that any product using conventional passwords would be an administrative nightmare. You're not really ensuring patient data security with traditional passwords, which can be easily shared by unauthorized users. SAFLINK's solution—which uses a individual's unique iris pattern to provide network access—provides irrefutable user identification through a system that is easy to use and maintain."

- Lynn Sims.
MIS Director, NFMC

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