

Advanced Pain Management
safely treats chronic pain patients
during COVID-19 quarantine with **cloud-based**
AT&T Office@Hand

- **Business needs** - The ability to care for patients and protect staff during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **Networking solution** - Cloud-based AT&T Office@Hand enables nurses, physicians, and other staff to consult safely with patients via audio and video conferencing.
- **Business value** - The ability to remotely deliver care in a highly secure way without endangering patients or staff.
- **Industry focus** - Healthcare
- **Size** - 500 employees

About Advanced Pain Management

Advanced Pain Management (APM) provides safe, interventional pain management procedures and therapies that provide long-term relief by addressing the source of a patient's pain, not just masking the symptoms. It is one of the largest and most diverse providers of pain management treatment and care in the Midwest, with more than 50 specialized healthcare providers at 22 health center locations.

The situation

Chronic pain doesn't disappear during a crisis. As COVID-19 spread and the government issued shelter-in-place orders, APM needed a way to continue to treat its patients' suffering with persistent pain.

Solution

AT&T Office@Hand is a flexible cloud-based solution that makes it easy for medical staff to deliver treatment using voice, fax, text messaging, and audio and video conferencing. APM's triage nurses use the solution to consult with patients, answer their questions, and arrange medication refills. AT&T Office@Hand keeps patients connected to their healthcare provider without exposing them or APM staff to the novel coronavirus.

A focus on patients and their pain

Advanced Pain Management (APM) works to help patients return to a life that isn't defined by chronic pain. Its Wisconsin-based clinics provide fast, convenient access to care with online appointment requests and same- and next-day appointments to help patients feel better faster. Its staff includes physicians, nurses, physician assistants, other medical practitioners, and administrative staff at each site.



APM's comprehensive approach to pain management puts the focus on patients and their pain, offering safe and responsible interventional procedures that go beyond injections and addictive pain medications. These

can include radiofrequency ablations, pump implants, and nerve-stimulating devices that address the source of pain rather than just masking the symptoms.

"Our doctors are world renowned, and they do some really great work," said Peter Ferr, APM's Chief Information Officer/Chief Information Security Officer. "It's a holistic approach to dealing with pain. Opiates are the last resort. Our doctors will try all other measures first to control or eliminate patients' pain."

"Our new tagline is 'Don't let pain define you,'" he said. "We want to help patients eliminate the pain that makes it difficult for them to live the lives they want to live."

Redefining the patient experience

Ferr and APM CEO Bob Bunker were both hired within the past two years with a mission to revitalize and grow the organization. "There are opportunities for us on the business side to expand beyond Wisconsin," Ferr said. He believes a renewed focus on the patient is key to the company's future. "One of the things I've learned through our CEO is that we need to drive a consistent patient experience."

"Now this may sound a little weird coming from the IT guy," Ferr continued, "but I've always been committed to customer service. Both internal, for the people you work with, and external, for the customers you serve." He is a proponent of using technology to redefine patients' experiences. Since he joined APM, Ferr has deployed laptops to increase staff flexibility. "We have a lot of the infrastructure in place to support mobility, but our phone system is old," he said.

APM was in the process of replacing its phone system when Wisconsin's governor ordered all but essential

workers to stay home to prevent the spread of the novel coronavirus. “We had one week to mobilize,” Ferr said. Like most medical providers, APM postponed all elective procedures and closed its locations, except for a few sites that open one day a week to provide prescription and pain pump refills.

“Regardless of the crisis, pain doesn’t go away,” Ferr said. “And not only does it impact the patient, but it impacts their families, their partners, and their spouses.” APM needed a way to continue to help its patients with chronic pain while its offices were closed.

Cloud-powered care

Patients who need help when APM clinics are closed usually go to an emergency room to be treated by APM physicians. Ferr wanted to cut down on patient and physician trips to the hospital to eliminate overcrowding in the ER and to protect APM patients and physicians against exposure to COVID-19.

He began looking at ways for APM staff to field phone calls from home. “When you’re shutting down 22 sites, you have to route the phone calls someplace,” Ferr said. “We had been using a distributed model but were looking at moving to a centralized model.” The order to close the clinics forced APM to act swiftly. “This kind of put us in fifth gear in 20 minutes,” he said.

Ferr was considering several possibilities when AT&T Business contacted him with suggestions. “The timing couldn’t have been better,” he said. Ferr was familiar with AT&T Business services. APM already used AT&T Ethernet on Demand for its wide area network. So, he was open to hearing what the AT&T Business team suggested to help them transition to a new work-from-home model.

Highly secure phone and video consultations

The sales team recommended AT&T Office@Hand’s cloud voice solutions. This would enable APM to continue helping patients even after the clinics closed. Office@Hand includes highly secure voice, fax, and text messaging, along with enhanced HD video capabilities that would make it easier for patients to consult with APM’s doctors and nurses.



Ferr was confident the solution would work for APM, but knew there were operational hurdles to overcome. “We had to reroute all our phones to the main number for Advanced Pain Management,” he said. “From there, since our operators were all sent home, we created an APM CARES hotline that AT&T provided us in the eleventh hour.”

APM used AT&T Office@Hand to forward the APM CARES line and all other calls to its triage nurses, who receive the calls on cellphones at home. These nurses became the frontline workers, answering calls from patients with questions or prescription or pump refills.

“Regardless of the crisis, pain doesn’t go away.”

Peter Ferr, CIO/CISO
Advanced Pain Management

“The timing on that just fit perfectly,” Ferr said. “Our triage nurses are taking roughly 800 calls a day through our APM CARES line. Even three weeks after we shut down, we’re still taking calls at a pretty good clip.”

Ferr said he thought the solution was reasonably priced even before he learned of a special offer for medical professionals: AT&T announced it would provide up to 70 days of free AT&T Office@Hand wireless service for new customers in education (K-12), healthcare, and non-profit social services fighting the pandemic. “AT&T said, ‘Hey, we can meet your timeline and get this turned up for you, and by the way, your first few months are no cost for healthcare workers because we understand what needs to be done,’” he said.

Seamless ability to work virtually anywhere

APM tested the system on a Thursday night. “By Friday morning I was rolling out the application to the people here at corporate and by noon on Friday, we were able to send everybody home. It was amazing,” Ferr said.

APM staff found it easy to begin using AT&T Office@Hand. “We were thrust into this work-from-home situation and had to mobilize people very quickly,” Ferr said. “I was surprised the application took off very quickly without staff getting any training. They simply downloaded an app, registered, and began taking calls.”

The solution offers APM many advantages, according to Ferr: “The biggest benefit is the ability to work from anywhere, and it’s seamless. AT&T Office@Hand works well for triage, which was our immediate need, but it has also proved invaluable as a telehealth application.”

Staff were initially concerned about using their personal phones to communicate with patients. “They didn’t want patients to get their home or cellphone numbers,” Ferr said. “We increased our license count so we could change the caller ID. Now when staff use the Office@Hand app to make a call, it comes up on the patient’s screen as ‘Advanced Pain Management.’ The patients will pick up the call because they recognize the caller ID.”

Ferr added, “It’s working very well for us for both the outbound and inbound calls.”



Help for healthcare customers in the trenches

Ferr was pleased with the AT&T Office@Hand deployment. “Sometimes the integration can be bumpy, especially with phone carriers and other communications services,” he said. “But this one was very well orchestrated. AT&T Business was focused on getting this working right away for its healthcare customers in the trenches.”

“AT&T, as big as it is, took an interest in our healthcare environment. There is trust there and a commitment to make sure we were working.”

Peter Ferr, CIO/CISO
Advanced Pain Management

He said he felt a bond with the Cloud Voice team from AT&T Business. “It was great. I didn’t feel rushed and I was given the keys early on to experiment with the service because they trusted us to get started. That made a lot of difference.” AT&T Business also arranged for the service to be installed before the start of the free period at no charge.

“AT&T, as big as it is, took an interest in our healthcare environment,” Ferr said. “There is trust there and a commitment to make sure we were working. We got what we needed right away. I think AT&T Business cares because they know we care about our patients.”

APM isn’t a hospital and is not facing a crisis of the same proportion that many hospitals face because of COVID-19, Ferr said. “Nonetheless, we still provide a service to our patients that can’t be stopped for a week or a month or two months. We appreciate the flexibility of AT&T Business to really step up to help us fulfill our mission.”