



Hospice Organization Provides Patients with Critical Services Through Remote, Technology-Enabled Locations

Customer Story



Heart to Heart Hospice leverages Flexential Professional Services to create, maintain and optimize managed firewalls and provide palliative and support care services to patients with life-limiting illnesses.

“Flexential is an essential part of Heart to Heart’s ability to deliver our hospice services to patients and their families, and it all boils down to these managed firewalls. We have worked with the Professional Services team to create a ‘plug and play’ template and process to configure the right equipment quickly, send it to a remote location, and securely set-up a new firewall. Our healthcare professionals provide care to patients throughout the day, and then come back to one of our remote locations to access our database and ensure the patient data is current and documentation is complete. We couldn’t do our jobs without these managed firewalls.”

David Spitzer
VICE PRESIDENT OF IT INFRASTRUCTURE AND SUPPORT
Heart to Heart Hospice

The History

Heart to Heart Hospice is a model for compassionate, quality care and supportive services for people with life-limiting illnesses and their loved ones. Headquartered in Plano, Texas, Heart to Heart Hospice provides a broad range of palliative and support care services to patients with life-limiting illnesses across 41 locations throughout Texas, Michigan and Indiana. The organization strives to enhance its patients’ lives by aggressively managing their pain and symptoms, helping to alleviate any discomfort associated with their terminal illness or disease.

When a patient is admitted to Heart to Heart Hospice services, the care team develops a personalized care plan in correlation with the patient and the patient’s primary care physician. Services provided include nursing care; physician services; counseling

Flexential Partnership Highlights

- Professional Services team works collaboratively to solve complex challenges and serves as a trusted IT consulting partner
- Managed firewall services help eliminate time-consuming and resource-heavy challenges and unify security management for this indispensable line of defense in a cost-effective way
- Secure, compliant colocation protects sensitive data

Quick Facts About Heart to Heart Hospice

- One of the largest private providers of hospice care in the United States
- Accredited as a Hospice Standards of Excellence Partner (CHAP), which demonstrates that an organization has met the industry’s highest nationally recognized standards in quality and compliance

and social worker services; homemaker services; physical, occupational and speech therapy; spiritual counseling and bereavement; and medication for symptom and pain control.

“Heart to Heart Hospice partners with experienced medical professionals, physicians, hospitals, nursing homes, long-term care facilities and insurers to educate the community on end-of-life care, and ensure that patients and families receive the care that they deserve,” said David Spitzer, vice president of IT infrastructure and support for Heart to Heart Hospice. “We focus on providing comfort, preserving dignity and enhancing the quality of life for our patients with advanced illness, so that they can focus on living well. Our care team is committed to providing patients with what they need most: freedom from pain, emotional and spiritual support, and the ability to control the direction of their care.”

To provide this comprehensive array of hospice services, Heart to Heart has assembled a team of healthcare professionals, including nurses and community educational representatives, who go directly to where the patient is – whether it is a home, hospital, assisted living or nursing home facility. The Heart to Heart team member utilizes technology to connect to and access patient data in real time.

The Challenge

A Need for Reliable and Highly Secured Access to Technology and Data

When Heart to Heart team members administer these hospice services to patients, they return to one of more than 40 remote Heart to Heart locations to complete the required documentation and update patient information using a secure IT environment. If the IT systems are not working, Heart to Heart Hospice would not have the information needed to treat the patient and keep the patient’s health record current. Also, the team would not know where to go for the next appointment because the scheduling system is maintained through the organization’s technological infrastructure.

Before looking for a comprehensive data center solution, Heart to Heart Hospice looked to the Flexential Professional Services (FPS) team to set up the company’s firewall equipment at its headquarters in Plano and send directly to the Heart to Heart remote locations. Then it was ready to be plugged in and connected to its data center, which was not Flexential at that time.

After considering other data center options, Heart to Heart Hospice selected Flexential for its colocation services in 2016 and moved its existing consumer-grade infrastructure to the Flexential Dallas - Richardson data center. The two-person internal Heart to Heart Hospice IT network team needed to build a new enterprise-level server stack with firewalls that would accommodate the organization’s high growth momentum.

“We were looking for reliable and supportable firewall configurations with ongoing monitoring and security patching,” said Spitzer. “The expectations we had for our IT solution were that we needed a combination of security and reliability along with

the expertise and bandwidth to identify, implement and maintain our system. As a healthcare company, we adhere to strict governmental and compliance standards.”

The Solution

A “Plug and Play” Approach

While maintaining the legacy firewalls, Heart to Heart Hospice created the new enterprise-grade server stack in Flexential’s Dallas - Richardson data center, established connectivity between the two server stacks and transitioned all the organization’s data to the updated environment. In addition to the colocation and cross connect services, Flexential migrated Heart to Heart Hospice’s Adaptive Security Appliance firewalls and the company’s demilitarized zone switches in the Richardson data center by collaborating with Flexential’s Service Support team and FPS.

“Not only did the Flexential Professional Services team step up and help determine what equipment we needed, they also helped configure and implement the enterprise-level managed firewalls and support systems necessary,” said Spitzer.

Heart to Heart Hospice now has firewalls installed at more than 38 of its remote sites connected via virtual private networks (VPNs), funneling all traffic back to the Flexential Richardson data center. FPS continues to assist Heart to Heart Hospice with bringing new remote locations online by getting the firewall equipment set up in its Plano office, shipping it off to the site and ready to “plug and play.” The FPS team proactively partners with Spitzer and the Heart to Heart IT team to manage all the firewalls and provide expertise on the ongoing strategic approach to the total IT solution, while the Flexential Service Support team assists with other day-to-day operations.

According to Michael Fitzgerald, senior director of engineering for Flexential Professional Services, the FPS team is helping Heart to Heart implement the devices and networks that are outside the Flexential data center environment. “We are going beyond the four walls of our Richardson data center and enabling Heart to Heart to create the IT environment it needs to provide patients and families with critical hospice services. The way this is modeled, through Professional Services, Flexential is able to extend these managed services beyond the perimeter of the data center to their own remote private networks.”

Spitzer added, “Flexential is an essential part of Heart to Heart’s ability to deliver our hospice services to patients and their families, and it all boils down to these managed firewalls. We have worked with the Professional Services team to create a ‘plug and play’ template and process to configure the right equipment quickly, send it to a remote location and securely set up a new firewall. Our healthcare professionals provide care to patients throughout the day, and then come back to one of our remote locations to access our database and ensure the patient data is current and documentation is complete. We couldn’t do our jobs without these managed firewalls.”

In addition to leveraging FPS’s expertise and ongoing support, the Heart to Heart Hospice team values the range of facility and security features found at the Flexential



Colocation



Professional
Services

Richardson data center. This facility features a data center footprint exceeding 100,000 square feet as well as state-of-the-art, 2(N+1) UPS power equipment and a powerful, highly efficient N+1 cooling system. With a 3.75 MW critical load UPS capacity, this data center also provides 100% SLA on power and four-zone security access.

“The layers and levels of security, such as our security badges and biometric screening provided at Flexential’s data center, are superior to other options in the market and the data center Heart to Heart previously used,” said Spitzer.

Heart to Heart Hospice also utilizes Flexential connectivity services and currently has two circuits – one dedicated to email traffic and one supporting the organization’s other traffic. These cross-connects provide Heart to Heart Hospice the diversity and redundancy it requires, as well as low latency, high performance and network reliability.

The Results

Significant Cost Savings, Increased Uptime and Improved Security Filters

“With the IT solution we implemented, the cost savings Heart to Heart is experiencing is monumental,” said Spitzer. “Last year we assessed our uptime with Flexential and we were in the 99% range, which met our expectations. Any time a staff member is in a remote Heart to Heart location or signed in through the VPN, we have the level of security needed to complete our job and help that patient.”

The organization has also enhanced its operational process as a result of the partnership with Flexential and the Flexential Professional Services team.

“We view Flexential, in particular the Professional Services Team, as an extension of our team and a vital, absolute partner to Heart to Heart Hospice,” said Spitzer. “The unique approach to helping us with the scope of work outside the data center environment is a game-changer. Since I have this FPS team behind me, I have additional expertise and bandwidth, so I don’t have to have more headcount on my team.”

One example of improved operational processes is how Heart to Heart Hospice implemented firewall equipment in its new remote sites. Before the restrictions resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, Heart to Heart would work with FPS to pre-configure firewall equipment for a new remote location and then send one of the organization’s own team members to install the device. With pandemic travel restrictions, the organization began using local contractors to plug-in and implement the new pre-configured firewalls.

“Based upon the partnership I had in the Flexential Professional Services team and the proven process we had developed together, I had the confidence to roll out this new firewall implementation system rather than having to have one of my team do it,” said Spitzer. “Even if we have the occasional issue with the remote firewall equipment install, collectively, we solve the problem and get everything working to support our hospice healthcare professionals.”

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Heart to Heart plans to continue to use the updated approach post-COVID because of its effectiveness, the cost savings experienced with limited travel expenses incurred and the time recaptured for team members' workload.

Going forward, Heart to Heart Hospice will continue to expand its patient service area and has plans to add approximately 10 new remote offices in the coming year. The company is also planning to launch its first inpatient care facility to provide hospice services on site. Located in the Fort Worth area, the new facility is expected to open in 2020 and can serve up to 14 patients. Heart to Heart expects to open several more hospice inpatient facilities in various cities in 2021.

ABOUT FLEXENTIAL

Flexential empowers the IT journey of the nation's most complex businesses by offering flexible and tailored solutions in colocation, cloud, data protection, managed and professional services. The company builds on a platform of three million square feet of data center space, in 20 highly connected markets and the FlexAnywhere™ 100GB private backbone, to meet the most stringent challenges in security, compliance and resiliency. Visit www.flexential.com.

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