Govroam helps Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board (BCUHB) adapt to new ways of working during the Covid-19 pandemic

Public sector workers throughout Wales use govroam, Jisc’s roaming connectivity solution for the public sector, to stay connected when they’re working on the move. The service was already used widely when the COVID-19 pandemic reached the UK and it helped NHS Wales to adapt swiftly, enabling healthcare staff to use council offices, leisure centres, schools and other local authority buildings without the need for new network arrangements. Using govroam they adopted socially distanced working easily, to continue delivering patient services and, later, establish vaccination centres. Staff could simply arrive on site and connect.

Govroam in Wales
The Public Sector Broadband Aggregation (PSBA) provides connectivity for the public sector in Wales. The PSBA initially developed a local roaming solution, which was then blended with Jisc’s govroam public sector roaming service for the UK. This gave staff in Wales access to a footprint of hotspots across the UK while also allowing public sector users visiting Wales to connect via govroam. The combined approach offers an enhanced level of access for Welsh staff when in Wales, who can connect securely to their home network environment via a tunnelled link.
Healthcare with roaming connectivity

BCUHB is the largest health board in Wales, with more than 17,000 staff operating across 120 sites. It provides primary, community, mental health and acute hospital services, working in partnership with local authorities and community services to improve public health and deliver excellent care across North Wales. After they moved several essential systems online, reliable access to connectivity became mission critical for BCUHB staff.

Govroam was embedded in BCUHB’s processes for several years before the pandemic. Thousands of staff laptops were govroam-enabled as standard and the service was broadcast at all sites with a corporate wifi network. In fact, BCUHB is consistently the highest service user in Wales, both in terms of the number of roaming visitors and its own connections from other sites.

It has proved a massive enabler for BCUHB’s staff, particularly the ones who work across multiple sites. It provides significant benefits for roaming workers, from managers attending a multi-agency meeting to social workers visiting patients in hospitals. Another key use case in the area has been health initiatives in schools: with local authorities broadcasting govroam on school grounds, nurses and health workers can get easy access to BCUHB child health systems on site.

Govroam’s user authentication is quick and seamless and provides Welsh users with a secure tunnelled link back to their home network. BCUHB staff can arrive at non-BCUHB sites, open their laptop, and connect automatically. This ease of use encouraged uptake in neighbouring organisations, with growth happening very organically based on observed success and word-of-mouth recommendations. In multi-agency meetings people saw govroam being used by colleagues and wanted the same seamless experience for their own staff.

The COVID-19 challenge

Although a lot of people began working from home during the pandemic, many healthcare services have had to continue to operate in public spaces. And so, for BCUHB, govroam usage increased during 2020 and 2021 because many teams moved to new sites and buildings to reduce crowding and work in a socially distanced way.
To give one example: midwives from a community hospital site relocated to a leisure centre to minimise the risk of COVID-19 infection. As the local council was already broadcasting govroam at the leisure centre and the midwifery team was already set up on the service, no additional network provision was required.

Similarly, any hospitals treating COVID-19 patients have had to operate with a reduced staff, with some teams moved to alternative office spaces. Having a strong govroam footprint across North Wales has helped BCUHB use the local authority estate in the region flexibly.

**Setting up vaccination centres**

Govroam also came in useful when it came to setting up local vaccination centres to support the push for public vaccination.

BCUHB delivers COVID-19 vaccines across a mix of mass vaccination centres, GP practices, hospital wards and community vaccination centres. The infrastructure required to get these running – including staff connectivity – had to be set up quickly and effectively. The majority of vaccination centres were in local authority buildings such as leisure centres, schools and public halls, where govroam was already in place. At these sites where govroam was already being used no further connectivity arrangements had to be made, freeing up effort for other aspects of the logistical challenge. BCUHB simply issued staff with a standard laptop, pre-configured for the service. This allowed them to connect to BCUHB patient records, the vaccination database and other essential systems, using a ‘zero touch’ process they were already familiar with.

**Keeping essential services on an even keel in uncharted waters**

Govroam has enabled frontline staff to access the systems they need while working across Wales’ public sector estate. Before the pandemic this expanded the number of places where staff could work across a large geographical area, while also reducing the time spent negotiating access to different local networks. And, most recently, BCUHB’s COVID-19 response has demonstrated the ways that govroam contributes towards business continuity efforts, allowing organisations to respond flexibly to unexpected challenges.

To find out more about govroam, please contact the govroam team:

Contact: govroam@jisc.ac.uk

or visit: https://www.jisc.ac.uk/govroam