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Roie Ederly  
IS Director

## IPC Keeps Doctors Connected Using F5’s FirePass Remote Access Solution

### Industry:

Hospitalist

### Challenges:

- Reliable application access
- Ease of use
- Scalability
- HIPAA Security

### Solution:

FirePass 4100 SSL VPN

### Benefits:

- Consistent, reliable remote application access from any hospital
- Easy to use, single sign-on access
- Improved communications with physicians
- Significant improvements in billing efficiency with reduced help desk calls
- Meets HIPAA information security requirements

### Overview

Founded by physicians in 1995, IPC has grown to become the nation’s leading private practice hospitalist company. IPC’s physicians, support staff, operations, and technology are all focused on driving the health care delivery system towards better, more efficient and more patient-friendly inpatient care. IPC has taken a leadership role in the emergence of this new medical specialty and today employs several hundred hospitalist specialists across the U.S.

Collectively, IPC’s physicians work with more than 12,000 referring physicians and over 1,000 health plans to manage more than \$1 billion in healthcare expenditures annually. Through IPC’s vision and leadership, the role of the hospitalist in private practice has also become more defined, to the benefit of everyone involved in the chain of hospital care – referring physicians, hospitals, managed care organizations, and most importantly, patients.

To help their physicians stay connected with critical applications and information from any location, and to keep that information secure, IPC uses F5’s FirePass® SSL VPN solution.

### Challenge

“We employ physicians across the country that only see patients in a hospital setting,” said Roie Ederly, IS Director at IPC. “They’re essentially doctors without an office. They’re a mobile workforce, but they still require anywhere-access to patient data, medical billing information, and other applications. That’s why we needed a product like FirePass.”

Ederly noted that within the hospital environment, he is often unable to provide IPC’s doctors with access to hospital workstations or even an Internet line or phone. They’re basically guests in the hospital. But they still require access to critical applications from wherever they were working, at any given time.

“It was a big challenge for us because we have a mobile workforce that we need to continually communicate with,” Ederly said. “Our physicians are required by company policy to enter their billing information on a daily basis, and also run various reports. And we had to make it easy for them to access this data remotely with just a single sign-on or password – otherwise, they wouldn’t use it.”

To ensure secure, reliable, and easy application access for the 700+ physicians that are part of





IPC, Edery and his team rely on the FirePass 4100 SSL VPN product, from F5 through partnership with Advanced Systems Group.

### Solution

F5's FirePass SSL VPN product provides secure access to corporate applications and data using a standard web browser. Delivering outstanding performance, scalability, ease-of-use, and end-point security, FirePass helps increase the productivity of those working from home or on the road while keeping corporate data secure.

IPC is using FirePass for their remote access needs, but they're also using it in a more non-traditional manner as well.

"We had several iterations of our billing application and reporting systems, so our doctors had to perform separate log-ins throughout the day," said Edery. "This posed a challenge because doctors would get confused on which password went where, or which link they should click. We needed to tie all of our systems into one, with a unified, single log-in, and needed to keep it secure. Only F5 was able to do what we asked."

Previously, IPC looked at building a solution in-house using a software package for single sign-on, but "it looked too cumbersome," said Edery. "We also would have needed to hire a couple of expensive programmers to get it running, and even then it wasn't guaranteed to work. And even if it did work, it would have to be manually updated to keep up with the latest security threats and trends."

IPC had a better plan. First, they built a portal the physicians could log onto, which included their email, region-specific content, call schedules, and billing information. On the main portal page is a button that reads *access my application*. The physician clicks on that button, a FirePass session window opens, and they are immediately authenticated (secured) and can begin their work. They never know that they just left the portal page and are now on the secure FirePass page; it's transparent – increasing physician comfort levels and productivity while maintaining strict levels of security for the data.

IPC can also control access to different parts of the site and different applications, depending on the user. A doctor might see one type of landing page; a back office administrator might see another. IPC is also free to add content to the landing page (reminders, announcements, data splashes) whenever they see fit – raising the level of inter-communication between doctors and the company.

### HIPAA – Beyond Standard Security

Consistent, reliable remote access to information, while working on the road or from home, is one thing. But it all means nothing if that information can be hacked by others, or unauthorized users gain access to private medical information or medical records.

HIPAA, The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act, requires healthcare organizations to take added precautions to ensure the security of their networks and the privacy of patient data.

"FirePass allows us to meet HIPAA compliance requirements," Edery said. "We can use it to monitor log-ins, and perform patterned-based intrusion detection. With FirePass, everything is centralized, controlled and secure."

This is all accomplished without a lot of maintenance. Fact is, IPC has a fairly limited IT staff in terms of numbers, and before FirePass, it was difficult to keep up with the newest security threats or provide the latest security patches. That is no longer a problem as FirePass ensures that IPC's myriad security measures are always up-to-date.

### User Reactions

Since FirePass' unique deployment began, user response, especially from those in the corporate office, has been ecstatic. "We're always thinking 'how can we better communicate with our doctors in a non-interruptive way, without having to page them or taking them away from providing medical care?' FirePass has helped improve our communication with our doctors."

Productivity has improved as well. Help desk calls have dropped dramatically since FirePass was installed, according to Edery, and overall billing efficiency has improved. FirePass, since it works over SSL, also allows IPC doctors to gain access to billing information from more hospital locations than ever before.

"FirePass helps us circumvent the restrictions of terminal services access," Edery said. "That used to be a huge pain for the doctors who wanted to do their billing from a



public terminal at a hospital. They simply couldn't (due to port restrictions) and would have to take their work home. FirePass, because it's based on SSL, gives them better access to more applications from a lot more locations."

As for F5, Ebery was happy that a vendor finally was able to deliver what he needed, instead of just offering empty promises.

"So far, for all of things we wanted to do (with remote access), F5 has had a solution. This solid solution was a refreshing difference from

their competitors, who over-promised and under delivered, stating that we had to run custom scripts to get it to work properly. Only F5 delivered exactly what we wanted, and kept their promises. I think that's great."

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