

# WESTERN CAPE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH



## THE CHALLENGE

The Western Cape Department of Health in South Africa needs reliable communication systems and processes in place to notify key personnel of time-critical situations. More specifically, the department's Emergency Medical Services (EMS) relies heavily on its paging system to notify physicians, nurses, administrative staff, ambulance drivers, and other staff members when they need to respond.

With six call centres located throughout the Western Cape province, operators used a wide-area paging system to dispatch messages to 4,500 contacts. The Department of Health soon discovered that staff were receiving multiple or unreadable corrupted messages because of overlapping transmitters. Additionally, when the system went down, there was no backup system in place, and messages were not delivered.

The Department of Health decided it was time to select a new messaging solution. They needed a more reliable, modern, and efficient messaging system that would allow them to dispatch messages to staff on a variety of devices – not just pagers. They also needed something capable of handling future expansion and integrations with building security and monitoring systems.



## THE SOLUTION

Driven by EMS, the Western Cape Department of Health searched for a new solution and found the Spok Messenger and Spok Fusion solutions. The communication system was set up and is now managed by Messaging Systems, a division of UC Wireless (Messaging Systems is the sole distributor of Spok solutions in Africa).

Spok Messenger is an intelligent middleware application that sends notifications from critical alert and alarm systems to the mobile communication devices carried by staff. These devices can include smartphones, pagers, Wi-Fi phones, cell phones, and others. In addition to automating message delivery from alert systems, Spok Messenger allows authenticated users to manually send and track messages in the system. The Western Cape Department of Health uses the solution for this purpose, and Spok Messenger is the centralised foundation

## OVERVIEW

The Western Cape Department of Health is responsible for delivering health services to the entire Western Cape province of South Africa and strives to provide quality health for all. As a part of the Western Cape Government, the department supports more than 400 primary healthcare facilities throughout the province, including 34 district hospitals, eight regional hospitals, and 11 specialist hospitals. Additionally, the Department of Health's ambulance service, Emergency Medical Services (EMS), consists of 50 ambulance stations and more than 250 ambulances located throughout the province.

## INDUSTRY

Healthcare

## BUSINESS DRIVERS

- Deliver messages quickly and accurately
- Leverage the latest messaging technologies
- Provide high-quality care for patients through efficient staff communications

## SOLUTION

Spok® Messenger and Spok® Fusion

## RESULTS

- Centralised communication structure for multiple facilities
- Enabled caregivers to personally send pages when necessary
- Improved staff satisfaction and efficiency

## CASE STUDY

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Dr. Shaheem de Vries  
Clinical Manager: Medical Support Services



of the new communication infrastructure. Additionally, with integration to a Spok Fusion module located at each hospital site, non-call centre personnel are able to remotely send pages just by dialing into the system via telephone.

“We chose the [Spok] solution because of its proven track record in being reliable and future-proof, meaning it’s capable of growing with the department as its needs evolve,” said Dr. Shaheem de Vries, Clinical Manager: Medical Support Services for Emergency Medical Services.

## THE RESULTS

The Department of Health’s call centre operators log into Spok Messenger’s easy-to-use web interface to quickly and accurately send pages, SMS text messages, and email to staff. This improves the overall workflow by allowing the right people to receive notifications and take fast action.

Often clinicians or nurses need to send an important message to a colleague or group of colleagues. Rather than having to contact the operators at the call centre to send the page, the clinicians and nurses are able to send the pages themselves, speeding the delivery of the messages. Staff simply call into the Spok system and follow the prompts to initiate messages to mobile devices. With a Spok Fusion module at each site, this is done at no cost because all calls into the system are internal.

The Western Cape Department of Health sends nearly 5,500 messages through the system each month. Every message is permanently logged in Spok Messenger, giving staff and management peace of mind knowing messages are being sent to the correct individuals and in an appropriate time frame. Also, having a precise record of which messages were sent and read by whom provides a higher level of traceability for the organisation.

With the updated communications structure in place, staff are no longer receiving multiple or corrupted messages, improving staff satisfaction and patient safety. In fact, the Spok Messenger system provides the Western Cape Department of Health with redundancy, which means there will always be a way to dispatch messages.

## THE FUTURE

“The most valuable feature of [Spok] Messenger is its ability to adapt to our needs regardless of size or geography of the site,” said Shaheem. “This agility is also seen in its ability to grow with new technology and changes in user behavior.”

The Spok Messenger system provides the Western Cape Department of Health with the ability to expand and enhance its communication infrastructure in the future. In fact, the Department of Health is planning to integrate Spok Messenger with its building management and security systems. This would allow notifications to be automatically sent from these systems to the correct individual on his or her mobile device.