



Oakhurst Medical Centers extend care into the community with telehealth and drive-through initiatives powered by AT&T connectivity

- **Business needs** – New ways to deliver medical care during and after the COVID-19 outbreak
- **Networking solution** – Telehealth programs and pop-up clinics support efficient care delivery and can help protect providers and patients against exposure
- **Business value** – Increased access to care, enhanced patient and staff safety
- **Industry focus** – Nonprofit medical care
- **Size** – 30,000 unique patient visits annually

About Oakhurst Medical Centers

Oakhurst Medical Centers provide quality, affordable healthcare services that are accessible to everyone in metropolitan Atlanta. The federally qualified health center's 7 locations deliver primary and preventive care, including prenatal, obstetrics, pediatrics, gynecology, internal medicine, and behavioral health.

The situation

Like many large cities, Atlanta has been negatively impacted by the outbreak of COVID-19. As part of its mission, the organization wanted to offer COVID-19 tests and provide other medical services to the hard-hit community. However, they needed a way to help protect staff and patients against the virus.

Solution

AT&T connectivity enabled Oakhurst Medical Centers to establish COVID-19 testing sites at 4 locations, and a centrally located drive-through testing site in South DeKalb County. Patients can remain in their cars, using tablet computers to attend virtual medical appointments with physicians. Those whose symptoms suggest the need are then tested for the coronavirus. The testing sites enable patients to receive the testing and care they need while minimizing staff exposure. AT&T Business also helped Oakhurst launch additional telehealth initiatives that further extend care to underserved populations.

Healthcare for a diverse community

Oakhurst Medical Centers in Greater Atlanta operate 7 clinics in DeKalb, Fulton, and Rockdale counties. As a grassroots medical option for the underserved and uninsured, Oakhurst saves taxpayer dollars by providing primary care to those who would typically seek help for non-emergency problems in an emergency room.

The medical center has grown from virtually no funding and 1-2 staff volunteers to several sites and a multi-disciplinary staff. Doctors, nurses, social workers, a nutritionist, a contract dentist, and an ophthalmologist are all part of the Oakhurst team. Oakhurst has a significant impact on the community, providing preventive care to hundreds of medically underserved area residents.

Denatras Silas, Oakhurst IT Director/Systems Administrator, says the center's patients and staff are

remarkably diverse. "A lot of the patients within our community are refugees, so we have to offer multi-language support," he said. "And we are a medical center that matches its base demographic pretty fluidly. Our employees and staff are equally diverse."

"We see every patient as a customer, so we definitely place a very high priority on how we serve them," he said. "We don't want to see you just one time. Our goal is to become your all-around medical service providers." Oakhurst staff strive to wrap services around patients, even assisting them in enrolling in community programs that could improve the quality of their lives.



Technology advances Oakhurst's mission

Silas, an Atlanta native, had always hoped to work in the medical field, but his love for technology won out while he was in college. He changed his major from pre-med to computer and information science. "IT has always been my first love," he said. "It comes as naturally to me as breathing."

He has worked in nearly every area of information technology, from web and middleware development to systems architecture and infrastructure security. After working for years at Fortune 100 companies in finance and technology, he moved to Oakhurst. “That broad skillset serves me well in working in an organization that’s as lean as Oakhurst,” he said. “I can wear multiple hats when they need to be worn.”

His financial services background prepared him well for the rigorous security required in healthcare. “From a security and privacy standpoint, keeping patient health information secure is second nature to me. It’s pretty much the same as keeping personally identifiable information as secure as possible from a credit card processing standpoint.”

“I don’t think we could do most of the stuff that we do if we didn’t have AT&T mobile connectivity.”

Denatras Silas
Oakhurst IT Director/Systems Administrator

Silas counts on technology to advance Oakhurst’s mission. “We provide reliable and comprehensive medical care to the community around us,” he said. “Technology allows me to support that.” When the COVID-19 pandemic struck, Silas began looking for ways that Oakhurst could continue to serve patients while protecting them and staff against contracting the virus.

Clinics powered by AT&T hotspots

Using AT&T connectivity, Oakhurst established drive-through coronavirus testing sites and isolation tents at 4 locations for patients who are ill. “We use AT&T Business for mobility and internet services, as well as faxing and landline capabilities,” Silas said. “In our drive-through tents, AT&T mobility services enable us to reach our Electronic Health Record platform and to make necessary updates.”

The medical center conducts the testing every weekday during typical business hours. “We hope patients will be able to drive in and get tested within 5 minutes or less,” he said. “As long as we have the funding to get it done, we will be a permanent fixture in the community, providing that testing as long as it’s needed.”

The service is available to anyone. Oakhurst patients who are preregistered simply drive through and receive the test. Those who aren’t registered remain in their cars while an Oakhurst employee uses a tablet computer to interview them and record the necessary information. “We have mobility provided by AT&T Business to perform that,” he said. “Our non-medical staff also use the connectivity for other tasks with tablets powered by AT&T hot spots.”

Oakhurst also uses the tablets to facilitate telehealth visits at its drive-through testing sites. “In case a patient has any other questions, they can have a telehealth visit with a medical professional right there,” he said.

The new normal

When the coronavirus forced people to shelter in place, Oakhurst saw a reduction in patient encounters. Telehealth visits, however, are helping Oakhurst to overcome the slump. “We initially saw about a 30-40% reduction in our normal encounters,” Silas said. “But once we were able to get telehealth in place and provide isolation tents so people could see their doctors, we began to get back to normal levels.” He estimates the centers are now operating at 85-95% of typical capacity levels.

“AT&T Business allows us to expand the footprint of our normal clinical area and makes us nimbler.”

Denatras Silas
Oakhurst IT Director/Systems Administrator

“Without technology, our patients couldn’t see their providers right now,” he said. Although Oakhurst used telehealth before the COVID outbreak, it was limited to a specific patient base. “Now I would say telehealth is the new normal for non-emergency visits where it can be done.” Telehealth enables patients to consult with medical staff without exposure to COVID-19 or other illnesses.

Working from home has also become the new normal for many of Oakhurst’s non-medical staff. “We’ve gone from a place where our administrative staff were almost 100% in the office all the time to about 10-20% of truly essential people being in the office,” he said. “This has pretty much allowed Oakhurst to maintain its current level of activity without seeing much of a negative impact.”

Oakhurst officials see the success of its COVID-19 testing as a blueprint for future initiatives. “We’ll use this pandemic as case data to make sure that what we want to do with AT&T Business from a mobility standpoint will work in other areas as well,” he said.

Expanded clinical footprint

Silas credits AT&T Business for much of the success of Oakhurst’s COVID-19 and telehealth projects. “I don’t think we could do most of the stuff that we do if we didn’t have AT&T mobile connectivity,” he said. “The medical profession is moving toward electronic health records and telehealth visits. Without that mobility, most of this stuff would not be possible—unless you want to see physical Cat6 cables [cables for Ethernet and other network physical layers] running across parking lots to plug in the routers and switches. That definitely isn’t the best way to go about it. AT&T Business allows us to expand the footprint of our normal clinical area and makes us nimbler.”

He said he recommends AT&T Business often to colleagues based on the quality of their products and services and the customer care Oakhurst experiences. “I’ve always held AT&T in high regard from a personal as well as a professional level,” he said.



Silas continued: “AT&T is much more than just a phone company. They provide anything from a cell phone or tablet to a solution for threat-detection software. From a technology standpoint, it is a good one-stop shop. In fact, I’ve even called on AT&T to help me with other vendors’ solutions. Case in point, I couldn’t get the rep for one of our infrastructure providers on the phone to save my life, so I reached out to AT&T. Within a day, my AT&T account rep had gotten a response from the other provider.”

Silas said vendors always took his calls when he worked at Fortune 100 companies. Now that he has moved to the nonprofit world, that’s not always the case. “I don’t have that stick of a big budget to wave around anymore,” he said. “It’s great to have a partner like AT&T. They are responsive. Customer-service driven. You wouldn’t know that we aren’t a Fortune 100 company by the way they work with us to get things done. It definitely comes in handy.”

“I don’t think we could have accomplished the things that we’ve done from an IT perspective without our AT&T Business account team.”

Protecting infrastructure and patient health records

Oakhurst plans to continue to extend its services into the communities it serves, including the introduction of pop-up clinics in some schools. “AT&T will be able to help us with that,” Silas said.

Protecting patients’ health information requires secure assets and secure communication pathways. “If somebody else’s wireless network were compromised, then my equipment and information could be compromised.”

Using AT&T connectivity, combined with other services and applications, will help protect Oakhurst’s equipment and patients’ medical records. “I sleep better and I’m much calmer knowing that my patients’ health information is highly secure,” Silas said.

Silas said he’s proud to support the important work of the Oakhurst Medical Centers. “I like just knowing that what I do makes an impact in the lives of people beyond me,” he said. “I guess you could say on Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, I’m at the point in my career where I’m more into the self-actualization standpoint where I want to be part of something that’s bigger than me. Oakhurst provides that fulfillment.”