Physicians at UMass Memorial Healthcare are constantly on the move between exam rooms, medical units and hospitals. Previously, they had to log off the system they were using at each location and then log on at the next location, which added to their already-overloaded schedule. However, the new single sign-on physician system known as follow-me desktop allows physicians to sign on once a day and have the apps they need follow them from location to location. No time is wasted disconnecting and reconnecting. The technology works with mobile devices, such as iPads, and most exam rooms today contain only thin clients. "We've gone full circle back to dumb clients," George explained to his colleagues at a recent Advanced Practices Council meeting, "which means that we actually use less bandwidth and can accommodate relatively low speed access because there is less 'client' on the desktop." Moreover, desktop support costs dropped substantially, although increased data center costs balanced that out.

The follow-me desktop and single sign-on capabilities were part of a larger revamping of information systems with electronic medical records. In 2012, UMass Memorial turned off old systems, turned on new ones, and doubled the number of devices accessing them. In the
process, UMass Memorial became one of the first hospitals to adopt a virtual desktop.

Although the new system is clearly easier and less time-intensive, the biggest hurdle was convincing physicians to use and embrace it. Brenckle and his team worked closely with chief medical information officers to listen carefully to current needs in the various healthcare environments while anticipating future possibilities. They trained a group of supportive physicians and then enlisted them to explain the new desktop to their colleagues by stressing the new capabilities and ease-of-use. This approach has been quite successful although some physicians are still hold-outs.

The follow-me desktop integrates perfectly with BYOD (bring-your-own-device) strategies. Previously, users working from home needed a virtual private network (VPN), but now they sign on as an end point. They can use their own devices or those UMass Memorial supplies. New Acceptable Use policies are device agnostic.

The new system enhances security because users do not need to carry data around with them, although some still want to do so. Since they have connectivity from anywhere, users can get the data they need when they need it. In addition, the new system aids in disaster recovery. If users can’t get to their offices, they can work from home. One APC member mentioned that his firm, which uses the same single sign-on system, benefited from its disaster recovery features during Hurricane Sandy in November 2012.

Reliability, however, becomes a significant issue if the virtual desktop fails. Brenckle has addressed this issue by building in redundancy with multiple server farms. This redundant capacity serves as an innovation sandbox when not needed for back-up.

Given an anticipated future increase in requests for patient care, reducing the administrative burdens on caregivers should result in more productive and effective medical professionals.