

Digital communications during time of crisis



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Soon Brenham Police will be enforcing the new law banning the use of hand held devices while driving in a school zone, so take heed. Since we are so used to yapping on our cell phones at any and all times it may be a big change for many people.

In times of crisis though, having reliable and efficient means of digital communications can be of critical importance. Our family had such a time this last week when our 10-year old daughter became mostly

always used text messaging to relay mundane stuff like what to pick up at the grocery store on the way home. That texting service between us, family and friends became hyper-critical the day we rushed her to Dell

paralyzed from Guillain-Barré Syndrome. Though this is a temporary condition lasting only months, it was also extremely scary since at first nobody knew what was wrong while we watched our child basically shut down.

My wife and I have

Children's Medical Center in Austin.

During a crisis the speed and flexibility of communicating through text message can be very helpful. After our doctor, Dr. Kenneth Baker, showed early concern for our daughter's deteriorating condition and recommended an immediate trip to Austin, I began texting the symptoms to my nephew who has worked in the medical field for decades now.

While in the emergency room, instead of calling family and friends to tell them of her condition, we simply texted them so we could still listen to the doctors and nurses along with tending to our daughter. That way we did not have to leave the room and go outside to talk on our cellular phones.

This kept us from missing the numerous doctors that came to evaluate her rare and serious condition. At one time I did have to go outside of the ER room to gather myself and consult my nephew to obtain more information which enabled me to ask more educated questions.

While out, sure enough, the neurologist arrived to our ER room so my wife text messaged me with, "Doc here — come back now."

That quick text message was done without her taking her ears or attention away from the newly arrived doctor and notified me to book it back in there with the newly received information about the CT scans and possible causes for her symptoms.

While we were watching the neurologist evaluate her, the text messages kept pouring in from my nephew with great questions to ask the doctor. I would then relay the doctor's responses and other pre-diagnosis comments back to my nephew for further analysis.

After the CT scan and spinal tap was complete the neurologist diagnosed her with Guillain-Barré Syndrome and I immediately typed that into the www.WebMD.com Web site via my iPhone Safari Internet browser and started reading the possible prognosis, available treatments and long term effects.

Though I looked like a complete geek typing on my cell phone while in the ER, I was on a dire mission to quickly obtain vital information to help relay past symptoms, illnesses or any other relevant issues that could help determine her treatment or back up the diagnosis.

During the spinal tap test I got a text message from my

nephew telling me to peek over and watch for the color of the fluid going into the vials when the tap is accomplished. He text messaged that if the fluid was clear that was a good sign. Sure enough it was crystal clear and when I mentioned the doctor, "Clear is good, right, Doc?"

The doctor looked up to me, smiled, and said, "Yes it is." By having the great information pumped to me via text messaging from my nephew, I was able to ask better questions and enhance the dialog between us and the doctors. Obtaining the medical information immediately via my iPhone browser through the numerous scientific Websites also kept me in the knowledge loop.

Our friends and family really appreciated the numerous status updates on her condition via text messaging because they surely did not want to call our cell phones during this emotional and trying time. This helped lower the anxiety for us, our relatives, and friends.

Just before we took off for the high speed drive to Austin, I had enough snap to quickly pack the phone chargers and that quick re-charge battery I bought at the airport.

That \$50 quick-charge bat-

tery was a lifesaver for me that day in the ER because it enabled me to recharge my phone after such heavy usage without having to plug it into an outlet on the wall.

Since the Austin Children's Medical Center was built by Dell Computer, the technology was first rate with a Cisco wireless network providing a public-accessible Internet service for all patients and caregivers. Once we got past the danger zone with her illness and settled into the hospital room for 10 days, I set up laptops for us to correspond with family and friends.

With rehab and some hard work in the weeks ahead our daughter's prognosis is good and we thank our wonderful Dr. Baker for making those time critical medical decisions which saved our little girl.

Bottom line: When times get tough, the tough can now text critical communications to get through some rough life experiences.

Next week's column: Microsoft security essentials.

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