



How Varonis Helps the Hospital Ship USNS Mercy Secure Patient Data

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About this case study:

USNS Mercy is a 1,000 bed hospital ship, renowned for its outstanding command and well-respected crew.

HIGHLIGHTS

Challenges

- + Protecting patient data along with mission-critical and potentially government-sensitive data
- + Ensuring that the hospital ship is self-sufficient and all data remains secure on premises
- + Maintaining a lean security team while ensuring that threats are promptly detected and defeated

Solution

The Varonis Data Security Platform:

- + Provides visibility into on-prem servers, Active Directory, SharePoint, and Exchange
- + Discovers and classifies sensitive data
- + Monitors and alerts to potential threats for fast threat detection and response

Results

- + Up to \$500,000 in cost savings
- + Varonis does the work of 4-5 people, saving time for the security team
- + Demonstrable evidence that the USNS Mercy can detect and stop security incidents

CHALLENGES

Protecting PHI and government-sensitive data

As a hospital ship in the United States Navy, the USNS Mercy must be completely independent and self-sufficient on the water. And it can't just turn on more cloud storage — everything needs to be protected on premises.

CIO Mike Taylor explained:

“The Mercy is a hospital on the go. We move to areas where people desperately need our help. Being a hospital, the biggest thing we’re concerned with protecting is healthcare data.”

But helping people isn't the only thing the Mercy does — its use case is unique, even among military treatment facilities.

According to the CIO:

“We’re not just a platform that provides healthcare, we’re also a goodwill ambassador for the United States. We give tours to foreign nationals and host events for dignitaries.”

“So it’s not just about protecting healthcare data — it’s about protecting data that might be mission-critical or government-sensitive.”

Wherever in the world the USNS Mercy is called to, protecting sensitive data is critical. That's why they have Varonis. Varonis helps them identify and remove stale data, and track permissions, active users, and network activities. This visibility is a must-have, especially when visitors are given temporary access.

SOLUTION

Security and responsive support

Wherever in the world the USNS Mercy is called to, protecting sensitive data is critical. That's why they have Varonis. The Varonis Data Security Platform discovers and classifies sensitive data, monitors file shares for signs of ransomware and other threats.

This visibility is a must-have, especially when visitors are given temporary access. Varonis enables the CIO's team to audit file access and review access permissions for remediation. If healthcare information is ever stale, overexposed, or improperly stored, Mike can quickly and easily take action.

Without Varonis, detecting and resolving potential threats would be a huge job — and require more personnel than Mike currently has on his lean security team.

“If we didn't have Varonis, we would need to log events from about four or five different places, including Active Directory and Exchange. We'd need at least 4 – 5 extra bodies, and those people might not have equal expertise across all systems.”

“You go cross-eyed pretty quickly looking at access logs and trying to decipher false positives from actual threats — and it's easy to miss something, especially if you're on a 90-day mission and you've been doing this every day for a month or more.”

For Mike and his security team, top priorities include protecting sensitive data, tracking user access, and removing stale data to save on data storage costs.

According to Mike:

“Varonis has helped us evolve the way we do business, not only by complementing our network protection suite, but by closing all the gaps that we thought we had covered with an elegant layer of software protection.”

Varonis also provides responsive support to help ensure that the Mercy always achieves the best results possible.

“They are super responsive, super knowledgeable, and they’re all problem solvers. They deeply understand the software and the requirements, and they’re able to look at my infrastructure and help me achieve the results I’m looking for.”

“I never feel like I need to call Varonis to check my system, because they do health check-ups all the time. It’s nice to have a non-invasive support system; I have nothing but great things to say about their support team.”

Varonis data security in action

Mike says it’s ‘vindicating’ to have a product that does exactly what it’s supposed to do — especially when it helps stop a potential breach.

That’s exactly what happened aboard the USNS Mercy.

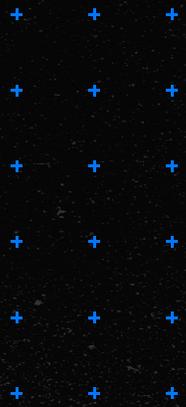
“I received an alert: someone was attempting to access data that wasn’t normally accessed by that workstation.”

Mike sent someone to check what was going on — and in doing so, prevented a potential security incident in progress.

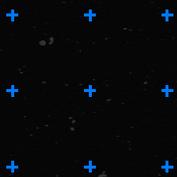
“Someone had walked away but left their CAC card in their workstation. They didn’t lock it. Then another person that was supposed to be part of a tour sat down and tried to access things. When we went to check, we basically caught them in the act — they were walking away really fast to catch up with the tour.”

Fortunately, the Mercy has protections in place. There was no way for the responsible party to copy data, plug anything into the computer, or open sensitive files. Nevertheless, Mike needed to prove that nothing had been compromised—and with Varonis, he was able to do just that.

“We had real-time data showing: here’s the exact time this happened, here’s what the person was doing, here’s what they tried — and failed — to access. We can easily determine, with evidence, that there was no incident.”



“Varonis is a force multiplier. I don’t need to have a super large staff — I can have a small team of people, like I have on the ship, and still have everything I need to make our protections better and take direct action on potential events.”



RESULTS

Cost and time savings for a lean security team

Varonis helps Mike's team stay nimble and adaptive, no matter what security challenges they may face.

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By his estimation, Varonis 'gives him back' the labor of four to five people, and saves his team time in the process.

“It frees up personnel to do more meaningful things like managing electronic health records. The time savings is great, but I think the internal happiness that my team has from not having to be chained to a desk and plowing through logs is also a big deal.”

For the USNS Mercy, this amounts to cost savings. Every extra sailor or civilian he needs on his team costs thousands of dollars—and a security breach would cost far more.

Plus, by pinpointing stale data that can be safely deleted, Varonis saves on data storage costs for the Mercy on a daily basis. Already, **Varonis has helped Mike reduce stale data by over 75%.**

“By allowing us to utilize our space better and more efficiently, Varonis easily saves us a few hundred thousand — maybe even half-a-million — dollars per year in terms of personnel cost and hardware cost recovery. If it also saves us from a security incident — that's priceless.”

With an 'elegant layer of software protection' helping him protect his command, Mike sleeps easier at night.

“I take personal pride in knowing that I'm doing good service to my command. More importantly, I'm able to demonstrate to CIOs and other leadership levels that my command is protected and that the Mercy is equipped to deal with complex cyber challenges in real life and on real missions.”



Your Data. Our Mission.

Varonis gives you a unified audit trail of events so you can find out exactly what's happening with your data.

[Request a demo](#)