



▶ GIP-RTR in the South of France

A healthcare applications showcase

Due to the increasing migration of both general and specialists practitioners to large cities, tourist areas or other highly populated regions, people living in rural or mountainous areas of the Midi-Pyrénées region have difficulty obtaining satisfactory health care.

In order to share the combined expertise of 53 private and public medical institutions in the Midi-Pyrénées region, the GIP-RTR (Public Interest Group - Regional Tele-medicine Network) video conferencing network has been established based on Polycom video conferencing and webcam solutions.

▶ Daily use

- Tele-consultations : 13525 patient cases treated per year
- Tele-training/tele-staff: 250 training sessions per year – over 20000 staff trained
- Tele-surveillance: preventive health education to the population, continuous medical education for professionals
- Support activities: setting up the network and tools, help in procuring the adequate equipment, co-ordination between sites, brainstorming on new usages, end-user training

▶ Solution

- ASTER: the regional high-speed IP network
- 47 video conferencing solutions for hospitals and clinics with a mix of Polycom VSX7000, HDX8000, some PVX/webcam
- 5 GP offices equipped with PVX/webcam
- 1 MGC-100 multipoint control unit connecting up to 32 sites
- 2 RSS 2000 for recording and storage, offering additional security and tracking

▶ Result

For patients:

- Easier access to comprehensive medical care through an extensive array of competences that can be activated remotely
- Patient satisfaction due to quick and easy access to their local GP

For health professionals:

- Complementary competences allows the best fit of treatments to the patient situations - often avoiding unnecessary patient transfers
- Consultative and collegial decision optimizes medical practice
- On-going interactive education provides and maintains highest level of competency

Why such a healthcare network in Midi-Pyrénées?

The Midi-Pyrénées is a vast region incorporating the Pyrénées Mountains separating France and Spain and includes areas that are secluded and difficult to reach. This remoteness often does not appeal to healthcare professionals looking to start a practice and, as a result, the inhabitants can suffer from lack of local medical facilities and treatment. The regional tele-medicine network enables these secluded communities to have access to medical services and healthcare professionals.

The goal is to offer equal access to quality medical care to the entire population, however secluded, the GIP-RTR trusted Polycom to help mix tele-medicine, training and research in an e-health and tele-medicine environment.

The objectives also included enabling multi-disciplinary exchanges between medical sites as well as supporting the development of partnerships between the large medical institutions and smaller GP offices.

Tele-consultations and tele-radiology via videoconferencing

The objectives of the video conferencing network are twofold:

1. to get remote specialists ('referants') to provide GPs with either therapeutic or diagnostic expertise.
2. to help in the decision-making process and to assist with patient transfers whenever this is the next step in the treatment.

The first tele-consultants involved coronarography diagnostics in the city of Rodez in 1996. Since then, the medical teams involved have established regular weekly video conferencing meetings. Doctor Monique Savoldelli explains: "The results of our first experience were very positive, and today, no-one misses these sessions. Video conferencing has proved to be more than just a remote communication tool, but rather a mean to optimize competencies, decompartmentalise healthcare sites and deliver medical expertise to all."

Based on Polycom video conferencing solutions for either group systems installed within hospitals and clinics or PVX/webcam installed in GPs' offices, the GIP-RTR Midi-Pyrénées installation enables 26 referants to provide expertise to medical professionals requesting help during tele-consultations. All medical specialities are involved, however the most popular are currently oncology, neurosurgery, radiology and gynecology-obstetrics.

"Our objective for tele-medicine is equal access to quality care for all, everywhere in our region".

Tele-consultations between several maternity hospitals began in 2007. These provided care for high risk pregnancies and choices for the best site for delivery, according to level 1, 2 and 3 of a location's medical capabilities.

Another example of the benefits of the video conferencing network is when it enabled specialists to diagnose a case of diabetes by simply showing the foot of the patient. The video conferencing solution also provides a 24/7 radiology service for the smaller and more remote healthcare sites.

Breaking into emergency unit and prisons

Remote emergency units, too, are benefiting from video conferencing by allowing doctors to obtain advice on head injuries and verebro-medullary conditions from neurosurgeons located at the regional medical hub. Emergency doctors are then better equipped to diagnose and offer recommendations on the best location to transfer patients.

The GIP-RTR Midi-Pyrénées has also established a tele-radiology and tele-medicine service between the prison in Seysses and the regional tuberculosis centre at Joseph Ducuing hospital in Toulouse. This fulfils the obligation to perform tuberculosis detection for all inmates through a pulmonary radiology check. Thanks to the ability to transfer patient X-Ray images via the video conference network, the radiology department of the Toulouse hospital can then undertake an accurate remote examination.

Tele-staff and Tele-training

The GIP-RTR Midi-Pyrénées is using the videoconferencing room to run interactive discussions between various medical professionals throughout the region. During the meetings, GPs and doctors present patient cases, discuss with specialists and decide on best treatments and protocols.

Videoconferencing systems are also used to provide interactive distance learning for all health professionals in the region; integrating local hospitals, regional and university hospitals and private clinics.

"Video conferencing has proved to be more than just a remote communication tool, but also a mean to optimize competencies."

The keys to success

Since the implementation of the video conferencing network, many factors are considered to have contributed to the success of the operation. Among these are choosing best-of-breed video conferencing equipment from Polycom, utilising the skills and competencies of a variety of specialists in a range of disciplines, and the strong financial and structural support from the health authorities. But it has been agreed by all that perhaps most significant is the role of the central support organisation.

Because of the complex array of sites (large and small, public and private, hospitals clinics and GP offices) as well as job functions (doctors, nurses, surgeons, radiologist, health admin) and equipment (medical devices, videoconferencing solutions, computer systems), the 26 referants benefit from a multi-disciplinary support team. This team comprises managerial, technical, coordination and administrative personnel who ensure every health professional is fully-supported in their medical activities.

Beyond the many current applications, the GIP-RTR Midi-Pyrénées also works, experiment and researches in several other areas. One of these is combining tele-medicine and traditional data within personal health records. Another sees it extending its reach into new hospitals and clinics that are constantly joining the network. It is also making in-roads into the aeronautics and space industries, for which Toulouse is an important centre.

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