

## Inland Northwest Health Services

# A Model for Dispersed Healthcare

## Hospitals leverage power of IP video network to extend reach of healthcare in rural eastern Washington

Healthcare organizations are facing the same challenges as corporate America – do more with existing resources, or in some cases, do more with less. In 1994, two major hospitals in Spokane, Wash., formed Inland Northwest Health Services (INHS), a non-profit organization that would cast aside the competition each faced and focus on areas of collaboration. The goal was to provide better quality of service and extend the reach of healthcare services to rural communities, while also looking for areas where they could reduce expenses.

Today, INHS oversees a range of organizations providing comprehensive healthcare services, including Northwest TeleHealth Services (NTS), which links 32 rural hospitals, five Spokane hospitals, clinical and educational consultants, and condition specialists over a private, secure network. NTS recently migrated from ISDN to an IP video network and has installed a Polycom MGC™ bridge for facilitating calls involving multiple sites and multiple network protocols, along with Polycom’s group video conferencing systems on roll-about carts, which allows video conferencing from multiple locations throughout the 37 hospitals. NTS has also deployed five rack-mounted Polycom conferencing systems in fixed locations for educational centers and content providers.

In addition, NTS launched a program to encourage physician use of video conferencing by allowing providers to participate in patient consultations from their desks with Polycom’s desktop video conferencing solutions.

“Before we converted to video over IP, we had very limited physician involvement in conducting patient consults over our network, because it involved leaving their offices to go to a hospital site with a video unit and taking x-ray and patient file information with them in paper form,” explains Margie Lockyear, project director for INHS. “Since deploying the desktop video systems, physician participation has increased dramatically because they are able to participate by video from their offices with immediate access to patient records, x-rays and lab results over our secure network. This saves precious time for the physician and also saves patients from traveling back to the physicians office which may be a 300-mile round-trip from some rural communities.”

### Challenge

Extend the reach and reduce the cost of healthcare in rural eastern Washington by linking hospitals, consultants, specialists and patients

### Solution

Polycom group video and rack-mounted video conferencing systems; Polycom MGC™ conferencing bridge; Polycom desktop conferencing software solution

### Result

More than 6,500 patients served through NTS and \$320,000 saved by rural hospitals and patients in just one year; less disruptive neurosurgery follow up visits

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*Margie Lockyear  
Project Director  
Inland Northwest Health Services*

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In just one year, INHS estimates that it served more than 6,500 patients through NTS and saved rural hospitals and patients more than \$320,000.

One of the most frequent uses of the NTS is for neurology. One neurosurgeon in Spokane holds weekly clinics with post-op patients in Okanogan County, located more than 140 miles away. Using a Polycom video system at the patient's local hospital, connected to the physician's desktop video system over NTS, the physician is able to see the patient and review progress and records simultaneously. This set up is less disruptive to the patient, who may be still recovering from surgery, as the patient can drive to a local hospital instead of traveling several hours in the car for weekly meetings with the surgeon.

According to one neurosurgeon in the program, his patients have been very pleased with the results and the fact that he's able to meet with them on a regular basis without the need for them to travel to Spokane. Using interactive video communications saves everyone time, and his patients show progress equal to or better than the patients he sees in his office.

Through the use of video communications and the NTS network, INHS is now positioned as a national model for meeting the growing needs of healthcare and addressing national issues such as bio-terrorism response, quality healthcare access for rural communities and reducing the impact of shortages in healthcare professionals.

## About Inland Northwest Health Services

Inland Northwest Health Services was created in 1994 when executives from Spokane's four major hospitals – Deaconess Medical Center, Holy Family Hospital, Sacred Heart Medical Center, and Valley Hospital and Medical Center – collaborated to merge competing business lines and form a new non-profit organization to oversee them; the first of which was Northwest MedStar. In the years that followed, it became clear that there were many more joint venture opportunities, and INHS now oversees several collaborative health care services, including critical air transport, medical rehabilitation, health education and information technology.



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