



Customer Success Story

Videoconferencing at the Orthopaedic Learning Center

The incision is less than half an inch long. With the greatest of care, the surgeon inserts the tiniest of cameras, then probes deep into the joint looking for answers. As the camera travels, it transmits a picture of its surroundings back to a monitor alongside the surgeon, who uses the image to further his quest. While the surgeon may be only inches from the task at hand, every move he makes is being carefully watched by other surgeons: some in a nearby meeting room, and others as far away as Hong Kong, Greece or Brazil.

For the past ten years, orthopaedists from all over the world have come to the Orthopaedic Learning Center (OLC) in Rosemont, Illinois, to learn new techniques, to perfect their surgical skills, even to learn the ins and outs of new surgical equipment. Quite often, however, many more doctors cannot take the time from their busy lives to make the trip. With the installation of an Aethra® Videoconferencing system, the OLC has made it possible for those doctors to share the learning experience with their peers.

"Often doctors do not want to leave their practices or bear the cost for being away," said Pat Cichlar, director of the OLC. "More and more often, they're deciding to do the long distance training, where you have small groups of surgeons in several locations. We transmit from here to them or have them transmit in to us.

"We recently did a resident course where one of the surgeons in Texas transmitted to us from his surgery center," she continued. "He was doing a live surgery procedure on a shoulder, so the residents here could see what was going on." The 48 surgeons who watched the procedure were free to ask questions while the surgery was being conducted. "Typically we have one surgeon as a moderator at the podium and he will communicate to the person doing the surgery. That doctor has a headset and he can communicate back and forth. It's very much live," said Cichlar. "The video is much more sophisticated than it used to be. Because of the type of surgery you want the higher bandwidth connection so that the movements are good, as opposed to some of the older versions that used to be kind of hesitant or slow. It works very well."

Don Kornfeind, technical consultant for the Orthopaedic Learning Center, chose the Aethra codec when he rebuilt the center's video system last year. Aethra develops, manufactures and markets audio and video conferencing systems, plus management solutions for audio, video and data services, ISDN and xDSL, and test equipment. "You can hold up to three calls at 768, which is more than other systems offer" said Kornfeind, who also said that he likes the fact that the Aethra codec is IP addressable, which will, down the road, allow the OLC to offer its videoconferences over the Internet. That would give the OLC's educational offerings almost unlimited reach around the world.

The American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons and the Arthroscopy Association of North America established the OLC as a way to offer their members a chance to further their education, but use of the facility is not limited to those two groups. "There are so many orthopaedic organizations and they are constantly coming out with new ideas, new surgery procedures, new ways of fixing things that they're trying to teach the surgeons," said Cichlar.

"This lab is state of the art these days. It's one of the biggest and best in the world," said Kornfeind. "There are some manufacturers and some hospitals that have facilities but they're all much smaller and not nearly as versatile. The Learning Center is often used as the model for those building this kind of facility."

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