Cancer specialists in the Greater Midlands Cancer Network (GMCN) wanted to meet more regularly to review patient care needs. This was an excellent step but the GMCN knew this would be costly in time and travel expenditure. Travel costs alone could be considerable; in the tens of thousands of pounds per annum.

The GMCN decided to commission BT to install video conferencing facilities in each Hospital so meetings could take place without this excessive cost.

Now, the specialists can meet just by stepping from their desk to the nearest video point, meaning more time for their top priority: patients’ wellbeing. Plus big savings all round for the healthcare organisations involved.

“We needed to bring in clinical inputs from other areas and set up specialist multidisciplinary teams. But the amount of time and cost spent in travelling to attend meetings was astonishing. So we chose to commission BT video conferencing. We wanted added meetings without added costs.”

Stuart Babiy
Information & Audit Lead
Greater Midlands Cancer Network
Case Study

Greater Midlands Cancer Network

Polycom HDX 8000 video conferencing means cancer patients get better care at less cost

Challenge

The Greater Midlands Cancer Network (GMCN) cares for patients across a sizeable territory stretching from Shropshire, Staffordshire, and the Black Country to parts of Powys. This includes eight primary care trusts, a Welsh local health board, seven acute trusts, and six hospices.

Several times a week, teams of oncologists, radiologists, surgeons, and pathologists meet. They look over patients’ cases together, exchanging information and collaboratively planning the best possible treatments. These multidisciplinary team meetings (MDTs for short) are part of the collective approach to patient care at the heart of the Improving Outcomes Strategy (DoH, 2011).

An important part of the Improving Outcomes Strategy and Improving Outcomes Guidance was to further enhance the use of MDT’s by creating Specialist Multidisciplinary team meetings (SMDT’s). This initiative would involve clinical staff from specialist centres being involved in the meeting along with the clinical staff from the local hospitals.

But because of long distances between hospitals, people found they could be spending as much time getting to SMDTs as they would in the meetings themselves. A 30-mile round trip for each person might become the norm and this was seen as time consuming and frustrating. Patients would miss out too because the specialists would have fewer hours free for clinics, ward rounds, and hands-on care. And hospitals faced big bills for fuel and fares.

Solution

What was needed was a simple way for specialists to see and share scans, X-rays, and medical images as well as discussing things face to face, but without leaving their workplaces. BT joined the brainstorming from day one to ensure they fully understood GMCN’s needs. The answer was the Polycom HDX 8000 video conferencing system.

Stuart Babiy, Information & Audit Lead for the Greater Midlands Cancer Network, explains: “The BT people recommended Polycom because they understood what we needed was very high quality images – technician quality – for viewing things like specimens and MRI scans.” Polycom met another essential too: the capacity for a big array of equipment plug-ins from microscopes and laptops to document cameras.

The team has found it easy to add video conferencing to its existing systems. There are 16 dual-screen video points across GMCN sites, connected together by the broadband N3 wide area network. Two screens mean that the 20 or so participants at each specialist MDT get the complete picture, just like a face-to-face meeting. They can see their colleagues at other locations on one screen while images, documents and presentations are displayed on another at the same time.

Value

Specialists can now make decisions faster and get more done. Speed’s important in most businesses but critical in healthcare where timely diagnoses and treatments can mean the difference between life and death. And everyone finds the Polycom system easy to use. Stuart says: “The consultants’ time is very precious. If it wasn’t working for them, they wouldn’t use it.”

Patients gain because medical teams can devote more time to them. The budgets of the local hospitals gain too. Stuart estimates it’s saving around £9,000 in travelling expenses every month, add this to the estimated £25,000 savings per month in productivity savings and that already adds up to about £400,000 a year. And it’s still early days.

Right now 11 specialist MDTs use video conferencing each week: using about 10 per cent of the total time available for video conferenced meetings. GMCN has in its sights a £1 million annual saving by boosting that occupancy even further.

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Information & Audit Lead
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