North Country HealthCare Chooses LifeSize ClearSea to Connect Remote Clinics, Provide Mobile Treatment to Local Students and Professionals

**Challenge**

NCHC needed a way to link geographically-dispersed clinics, as well as collaborate with remote care providers over HD video conferencing.

**Solution**

Using LifeSize® ClearSea™, NCHC was able to offer video conferencing to their provider base using desktop PCs, laptops and mobile devices like smartphones and tablets.

**Results**

By equipping a mobile clinic with LifeSize ClearSea, NCHC can help more individuals (including elementary and high school students, and employees of a major local company) than ever before. The organization plans to continue using LifeSize ClearSea to reach more of its telehealth goals in the future.

Through LifeSize’s mobile and desktop solution, NCHC is able to provide primary care services to more patients in more locations.

Organization

North Country HealthCare, Flagstaff, Arizona, USA

North Country HealthCare (NCHC) is the only publicly-supported community healthcare center in northern Arizona. With a presence in 13 communities stretching from the Colorado River to the border of New Mexico, the organization provides a variety of primary care services to patients of all ages, many of whom live in lower-income, rural communities with little access to certain types of medical services.

Along with its traditional medical practices, the organization also adopted telemedicine in 2009 to interconnect satellite clinics across its various sites.
Challenge

Because many of the healthcare organization’s locations are in extremely rural areas, NCHC found it difficult to employ physicians to reside in such communities and, if they did, it was a challenge to retain them. However, NCHC was determined to find a way to provide medical services to residents of even the smallest towns even if medical staff were difficult to come by. The answer to this problem was telemedicine. By using video conferencing technology, NCHC realized it could link its 14 geographically-dispersed locations (some as far as 600 miles apart) without sacrificing the experience of genuine, face-to-face interaction between doctors and patients.

Initially, NCHC decision makers chose a third-party legacy video collaboration solution to place in all of its clinics. Though this model worked for a fair amount of time, the organization realized that in order for its telemedicine initiative to be truly successful, they needed a video collaboration system that could work over wireless networks, and with PCs and mobile devices, such as tablets and smartphones.

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- Greg Hales, Telehealth Manager, North Country HealthCare
When Greg Hales, Telehealth Manager of North Country HealthCare, was first introduced to LifeSize ClearSea, an enterprise-class client/server solution for desktop and mobile video collaboration, he was immediately intrigued.

“In order for our clinics to be able to connect to remote care providers and offer the kind of treatment we believe in, I knew we needed a future-proofed video conferencing solution that could work with mobile devices of any kind, as well as laptops and desktop PCs,” said Hales. “LifeSize ClearSea provided great image quality, even over wireless networks, and offered the security we needed to use it in a medical environment.”

Because LifeSize ClearSea is a secure video solution, NCHC will be able to deploy it to healthcare providers across its 14 clinics, as well as remote care providers in the fields of primary care, Hepatitis C, HIV/AIDS, behavioral health, and dermatological services. Through this real-time, face-to-face interaction, doctors can emulate in-person patient encounters and provide excellent quality care.

“With telemedicine, you used to only have two options. First, you could have an asynchronous medical encounter where pictures are sent to a physician to evaluate at their convenience,” explained Hales. “NCHC’s model is to combine the two. Using an H.323 endpoint and LifeSize ClearSea, doctors are able to meet with patients in real-time while evaluating supplementary information sent synchronously via the technology. It really is the best of both worlds.”
Results

NCHC’s management team believed telemedicine could do far more than just link clinic locations; they decided to equip a mobile clinic with LifeSize ClearSea video technology to serve even more populations. Many schools in Flagstaff no longer employ full time nurses due to budget cuts, so NCHC has stepped in to assist. The RV, equipped with wall-mounted iPad tablets, travels to local elementary and high schools in Flagstaff and provides primary healthcare services to the students in need. After the school day is finished, the clinic also serves employees at W.L. Gore & Associates, Inc., a large manufacturer in Flagstaff that develops GORE-TEX® fabrics, among other products. In most cases, nurse practitioners ride in the mobile clinic to support the patients, but when a second opinion from a physician is needed, or the medical situation is too complex for the nurse to handle on his or her own, LifeSize ClearSea is used to connect the patient with a doctor. “Having LifeSize ClearSea in our mobile clinic is invaluable in those special instances,” said Hales. “We foresee big things for this program in the coming years.”

Not only do patients have access to a doctor at their fingertips if needed, NCHC has also found the video systems useful for non-English speakers. If the patient (or their parent) is in need of a Spanish-language interpreter, the nurse practitioner can make a simple 4G video call on LifeSize ClearSea and connect instantly in HD quality.

“For us, it’s all about convenience and accessibility,” concluded Hales. “Our goal is to provide primary care services to anyone, regardless of where they may be. That’s the future of healthcare as I see it, and I am confident that LifeSize ClearSea will help get us there.”