



## No Longer An Island, Medically Speaking

### *Isolated medical clinic uses video conferencing technology to deliver quality care to local patients*

Finding quality medical care could be a challenge if you live on an island in the middle of Lake Erie. Not the case, however, for the 275 year-round residents of Pelee Island. The Pelee Island Medical Clinic is overcoming the challenges of geography by using interactive video conferencing from Polycom, Inc. to connect to expert medical resources on the mainland and deliver the highest standard of care to its residents and visitors.

Pelee Island, located near the center of Lake Erie, is accessible by ferry spring through fall, and only by plane during the winter months. The island's sole medical facility, the Pelee Island Medical Clinic, offers primary health assessment, health monitoring, and 24-hour emergency services to this community. The clinic works with its mainland parent, Leamington District Memorial Hospital (LDMH), to obtain additional resources and medical expertise.

In the past, the clinic's nurses would telephone an emergency physician at Leamington to consult on a case, relying completely on verbal descriptions to communicate patient conditions, concerns, and assessments. While this was the best method of communication available, it was not always accurate or reliable. *Integrated video conferencing technology from Polycom now enables the two organizations to connect visually and share data in real-time, turning the clinic into an extended department of the hospital and enabling its staff to deliver the highest level of care possible.*

### **Video Conferencing Improves Patient Care**

Leamington Hospital participated in a study completed by the CLOVER (Communicate and Learn Over Video within the Essex Region) group, an amalgamation of seven hospitals in Southwestern Ontario. They tested several different video conferencing solutions and recommended the clinic implement Polycom systems based on their high resolution imaging, reliability, and attractive price.

"Polycom was a natural fit for the clinic," said Chris Niemi, director of information services at Leamington Hospital. "We were already successfully using the technology at LDMH. And the systems are so reliable and easy to use that our medical teams are able to focus on the task at hand."

The Pelee Island Medical Clinic implemented Polycom's ViewStation™ 512 group video conferencing systems and its ViaVideo™ desktop video conferencing appliances starting in August of 2001. The clinic uses an IP network to connect staff and patients on Pelee Island with emergency physicians at Leamington Hospital – providing real-time, accurate assessments and care.

*"The Polycom systems enable us to more efficiently and accurately diagnose a variety of conditions,"* said Marlene Pierce, nurse manager at Pelee Island Medical Clinic. "This means we can put appropriate care in place more quickly, and if we need to transfer a patient to the mainland, the hospital is fully prepared."

### **Island Community Reaps Additional Benefits**

While improving patient care was the primary objective, video conferencing benefits the island in many far-reaching ways. Previously, patients would have to travel by ferry to the mainland for pre-op procedures and then again for surgery. The cost and inconvenience of this travel was often prohibitive, especially for elderly patients. Now, patients participate in pre-op procedures and consultations via video conference, reducing travel requirements.

In addition, due to a limited budget and resources, the clinic could not previously offer mental health programs or child and family services. Using Polycom's video conferencing solutions, members of the Pelee Island community can now leverage existing programs developed by Leamington Hospital.

The Pelee Island Medical Clinic's staff is also benefiting from access to training opportunities. Prior to the implementation of video conferencing, a staff member would have to travel to the hospital via ferry for any training – out of touch for an entire day. "This was not a viable option, as we did not have enough staff to be able to spare medical resources," said Pierce. *"Now, using video conferencing, our care providers can participate in training and administrative meetings and keep current with the latest medical innovations without having to leave the island."*

"We seek to leverage the technology for a broad range of applications," adds Pierce. "By generating a greater hospital presence on the island, we are able to offer an unlimited array of programs and services – the sky is the limit."

The Pelee Island Medical Clinic was recently honored with Hospital Quarterly's National Best Practices Award for its demonstrated impact on patient care, innovation, and human touch.

The clinic is continuously looking for ways to expand its ability to provide better patient care via video conferencing. "Our costs are minimal and can be attributed over more and more initiatives," said Niemi. "Looking to the future, we see enormous value from the incorporation of video conferencing into our care programs, and we hope that they will serve as a model for other rural geographies."