

Smooth Labor

St. Mary's welcomes its new arrival: MPEG-2 on demand

By Steven Klapow

AV Video Multimedia Producer | avmmp.com | September 2003

When it comes to hospitals' investments, the two top things that come to mind are medical staffing and equipment; however, two hospitals recently decided to invest in upgrading their in-house cable system. The TV network at St. Mary's Medical Center and St. Mary's Riverside has been given a shot in the arm so that it complements the degree of care patients receive.

The video shown across St. Mary's network varies widely. Patients can watch educational content that can help them understand more about their illnesses and treatment, or they can tune to channels that feature soothing images and music. Staff members have several channels available for training.

For several years, the Evansville, Indiana, hospitals have provided patient-oriented programming from sources such as The C.A.R.E. Channel, which is produced by Healing HealthCare Systems (HHS). Until recently, however, all of the content was supplied on, and played out from, videotape.

"We had problems with those old videotape systems," says Bill Shewmaker, audiovisual production specialist for St. Mary's. The tapes have a limited capacity, which limits the number of programs the hospital system could run in a day, he explains, adding that videotapes sometimes wore out and needed to be replaced every six weeks.

Shewmaker shopped around for a digital delivery system with on-demand playback but was unimpressed with some of the available offerings. "Some companies limited the number of programs," he says. "If I wanted to run 15 programs a year, they would incorporate that for me, but I would have to ship tapes to their location because they wanted to be in charge of the system. Any programs beyond that would carry an additional fee. They had a two- to three-week lead time, and if we wanted a rush, we had to pay an extra fee, plus overnight shipping costs. They also wanted to sign us to a five-year contract, in addition to purchasing the system. The costs were exorbitant compared to what we spent."



Adtec's Soloist 2

Shewmaker eventually chose the Soloist 2, an MPEG-2 player from Adtec (www.adtecinc.com). "With the Soloists, we can own the system, have control over it and do what we need to do," he says.

Furthermore, Shewmaker was able to install the Soloists himself, with some help from the hospital's engineering staff. The entire process, including cable-pulling and final tweaks, took only about two to three weeks.

The single-rack-unit Soloist 2 can accommodate two 80 GB hard drives, providing a total capacity of 160 GB. The removable hard drives make it easy to update



Bill Shewmaker with the newly installed Adtec Soloist 2 units

content, and there are no tapes that can wear out from continual play.

Content from HHS is still arriving at St. Mary's on videotape, but it is later encoded on a workstation provided by Adtec for delivery from the Soloist 2s. Patients can watch content on demand, using their room telephones to make their selections.

Upping the Dosage

St. Mary's was so pleased with the results of its first installation of 12 Soloist 2 players, the number has grown to 20, and the number of available programs, to 60. "Our premise in the beginning," Shewmaker says, "was to have one channel for patient education, one for staff education and one for cardiac patient education. What we've done since then is install four channels of patient education on demand and four channels of staff education on demand. We're in the process of upgrading that to eight channels."

St. Mary's also plans to use Soloist 2s in its upcoming launch of Spanish-speaking patient education on demand. Around press time, two closed-captioned on-demand channels—one for general patients, one for cardiac patients—are expected to be deployed.

The organization is also getting ready to launch another four channels of education geared specifically toward training and preparing the hospital staff to respond to high-level trauma situations.

"The programming shown throughout St. Mary's comes from multiple sources," says Shewmaker. "We don't stay with one provider," he says. Content that can't be purchased is sometimes produced in house.