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## **Virginia's TeleStroke Program Becomes Operational With Introduction of Robots at Bath Community Hospital and University of Virginia**

HOT SPRINGS, Va (May 5, 2008) -- Stroke patients are now able to receive a whole new level of care at Hot Spring, Virginia's Bath Community Hospital, thanks to the addition of one new staff member—a robot known as RP-7.

The critical access hospital is the pilot site for the phase one development and roll-out of the Virginia Acute Stroke Telehealth (VAST) Network. As part of the federally-funded VAST initiative, Bath Community Hospital is working with the University of Virginia, Rockingham Memorial and Augusta Medical Center to identify, understand and analyze stroke systems of care from a regional viewpoint.

Health information technology (HIT) is a critical component of VAST and the introduction of the RP-7 (Remote Presence) robots from Santa Barbara, Calif.-based InTouch Health ([www.InTouchHealth.com](http://www.InTouchHealth.com)) is an important part of that technology. An RP-7 has also been deployed for evaluation purposes at the University of Virginia Medical Center.

The robots enable medical professionals to be in two places at once. In this case, a neurological stroke specialist at the University of Virginia Medical Center, Rockingham Memorial or Augusta Medical Center can utilize the audio, visual and data transmission capabilities of the robot to assess the condition of a stroke patient at Bath Community Hospital. Based on that assessment, a patient, if warranted, can be given the clot-busting drug “tissue plasminogen activator” (tPA), which can significantly reduce the effects of stroke and reduce permanent disability. If the patient is improperly diagnosed, the drug can be fatal. If it is administered beyond the three hours of stroke onset it has little or no effect.

Which is the role of the RP-7—eliminate the time-consuming transport of potential stroke victims for evaluation and administration of tPA so they are more likely to receive the care they need within those critical three hours.

“The robots’ information communication capabilities have the potential for putting the expertise of stroke specialists into any hospital, anywhere in Virginia, on a 24/7 basis, and enabling all Virginians equal access to quality stroke care,” said Cynthia Barrigan, Executive Director of the Virginia Telehealth Network which is helping in the design, development, testing and evaluation of

the VAST initiative.

*ADD ONE – Telestroke Program Robots*

The robot is more than just a video conferencing system on wheels. It runs on electricity and the hospital's WiFi wireless Internet system. When not in use, it is plugged into a wall socket. When it is needed it can unplug itself and head off to wherever it is needed – all under the control of the remote physician who may be hundreds of miles away.

Riding on top of the 5 foot, cylinder-shaped unit is a flat panel screen and on top of the screen are high-powered lenses. The lenses can provide a wide-angled view or zoom in for a close look into a patient's eyes or glance at monitoring equipment. It also has a line of sensors toward the bottom that "feels" its way as it rolls down a hallway. If it senses something is in the way, it stops...even if the operator is telling it to go.

The remote physician pilots and operates the robot using a laptop computer and joy stick. The doctor's face is seen on the robot's screen and his voice is emitted from a speaker just below.

The RP-7 is being used by health care networks throughout the country and the U.S. military for many health care applications beyond stroke evaluation. The technology represents a solution to helping bridge the rural health care gap, giving patients the benefits of having equal access to many different levels of medical specialties as those who live in urban centers.

This first phase of the VAST Network implementation is scheduled to run through February, 2009.

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