

Bringing the Cardiology Community Together in Real Time

- a close-up look at the Freeman Hospital's implementation of the new Life Stream system that streams cases in real time, greatly enhancing department productivity and patient care.

What is Life Stream?

A high speed, high definition communication device designed to allow cardiologists in a DGH to discuss patient medical images in real-time with a surgeon and other cardiologists at a tertiary centre, all at the touch of a button. Both parties can view exactly the same image at the same time and have the ability to pause, play back, or manipulate the images to arrive at the most appropriate course of treatment. The system which is the subject of a medical white paper has been shown to reduce waiting lists by 1/3 and improve efficiency by a similar amount.

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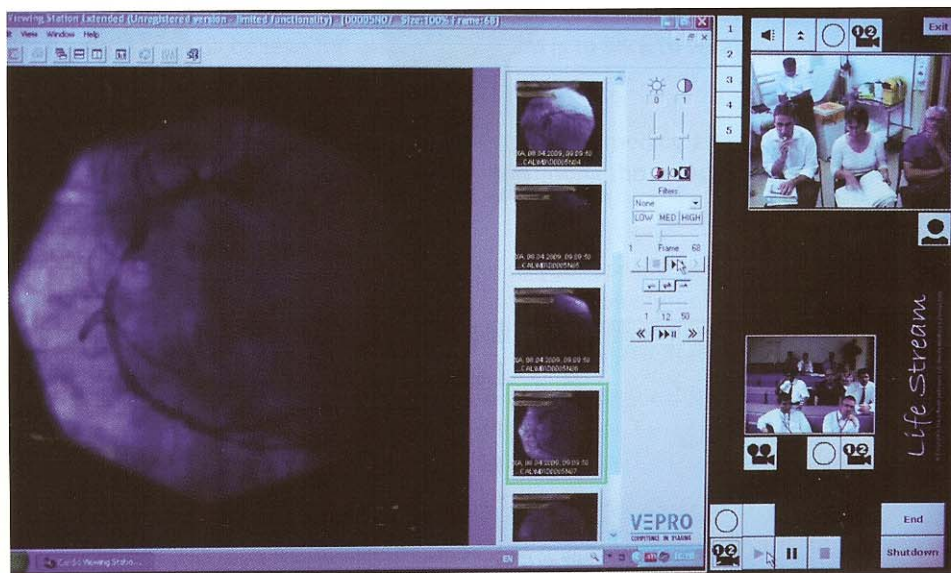
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The Life Stream streaming video display with Whitehaven Hospital & Freeman Hospital seen real-time in the right column

What is the aim of trialling the Life Stream system?

The aim is to establish a multi-disciplinary team (MDT) meeting across the network to discuss revascularisation options. We want to involve our referring hospitals so they get the benefit of an MDT decision promptly after coronary angiography.

What are the advantages over traditional PACS?

There are two issues we need to resolve. First is the secure electronic transmission and storage of angiographic images sent by the referring hospital to the surgical centre. This reduces the need (time and money) for an individual to make copies on CD/DVD and send by courier.

Second is the ability to view live images simultaneously with distant colleagues in order to facilitate a MDT. This leads to an immediate decision and only those cases accepted need to be sent to the surgical centre.

I am unaware of a system that has the ability to perform the above two tasks simultaneously.

Lifestream is a portable technology that allows us to link up with colleagues at distant hospitals and review angiograms. There are stand alone image transfer technologies that require dedicated video conferencing facilities in order to share a MDT.

Why did you choose Life Stream?

I ran into their stand at BCS and am not aware of any other system that does this.

How has your experience been so far with the system?

The first week had teething problems, the second week was good, and the third week was very good. It is quite clear there is a learning period in setting up the system and of course because we are "on demo" our Trust hasn't released all the bandwidth that is required to run this system. Nevertheless, image quality is excellent but the audio quality needs to be improved.

Perhaps its greatest advantage over video conferencing is its flexibility. It is possible to wheel the screen and console into any room with an ethernet connection (own office?!) and link up with other colleagues.

Future Plans?

To link all the seven hospitals referring into Freeman to have this system.

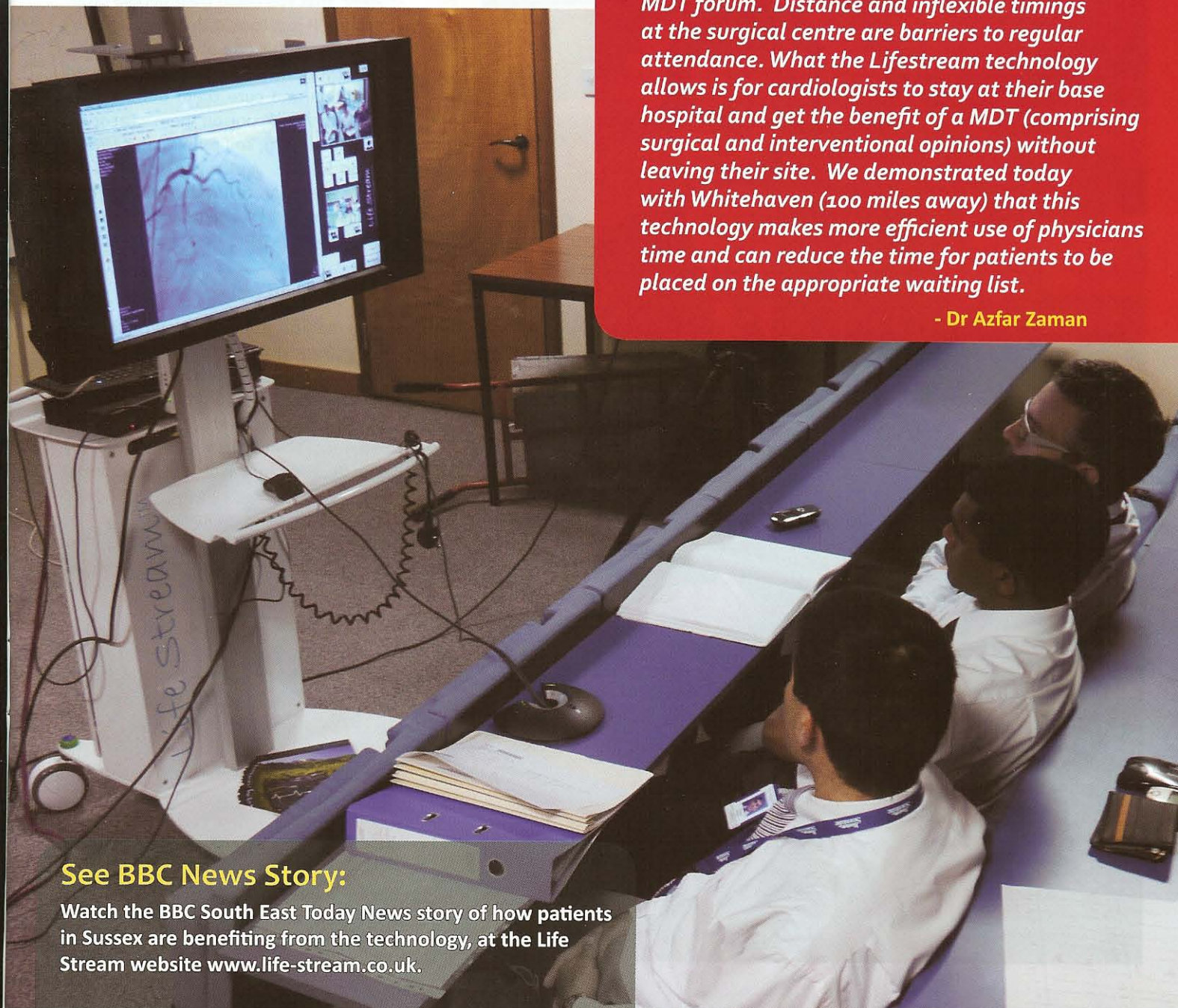
How would that work with seven meetings running simultaneously?

We would then have, for example, one meeting per day. At least one surgeon and one interventionist from our end to discuss cases with the referring hospital. It just wouldn't be possible to have the MDT all in one day with seven hospitals.

What current problem does the Life Stream system solve?

At present, the majority of cardiologists in our Network do not have access to a revascularisation MDT forum. Distance and inflexible timings at the surgical centre are barriers to regular attendance. What the Lifestream technology allows is for cardiologists to stay at their base hospital and get the benefit of a MDT (comprising surgical and interventional opinions) without leaving their site. We demonstrated today with Whitehaven (100 miles away) that this technology makes more efficient use of physicians time and can reduce the time for patients to be placed on the appropriate waiting list.

- Dr Azfar Zaman



See BBC News Story:

Watch the BBC South East Today News story of how patients in Sussex are benefiting from the technology, at the Life Stream website www.life-stream.co.uk.