

## **Neurology Telemedicine Firm Inks ER Consultation Deals in California**

### **On-call Specialists Do Long-Distance Patient Diagnosis**

**By Ron Shinkman 3/30/09 Volume 16 Number 13**

WESTLAKE VILLAGE, CA – A neurology telemedicine firm with long-distance consulting links in six states has entered the California market with the goal of relieving a chronic shortage of on-call specialists at hospital ER's. Specialists On Call, Inc. of Westlake Village signed its first California contracts in January with Rancho Springs Medical Center in Murrieta and Inland Valley Regional Medical Center in Wildomar. Earlier this month, SOC added Fremont Medical Center and Rideout Memorial Hospital, both in Yuba City.

The private telemedicine company expects to ink deals with more California hospitals in the coming months, says Clark Wells, Director of New Business Development. Many hospitals in the state, particularly in rural areas, struggle with requirements to have on-call specialists available for emergencies. Hospitals using SOC can link up immediately with a board certified neurologist for ER consults, Clark says. A high-definition telemedicine link and telemetry of medical records gives a neurologist enough data to make an accurate patient diagnosis, he adds. The firm contracts with approximately 45 neurology specialists licensed to practice in six other states – Florida, Massachusetts, Montana, New Jersey, Texas and Virginia. The neurologists receive privileges at SOC member hospitals and often give long-distance consultations from the comfort of home. "If there's any neurological emergency and the local ED physician has any questions or reservations, they can contact a neurologist," Wells says.

In California, travel and reimbursement issues make it difficult for doctors to guarantee on-call coverage at ER's, Wells says. Neurologists recruited by SOC can supplement their income doing consults without having to drive around in the middle of the night, he adds. CEO, Joe Peterson, M.D., predicts the company will handle 6,000 telemedicine consults in the seven state region in 2009, more than double the number done since launching the ER service in 2005.

The Hospital Association of Southern California recently gave SOC a boost by endorsing the service that gives participating members an undisclosed discount, says Jim Baber, Association President and CEO. "Our collaborative efforts will provide a much needed service to Southern California hospitals and address a long standing problem faced by our member hospitals," Barber says. In the near future, the on-call service plans to add consultations with pediatric intensivists and psychiatrists – two other specialties with severe shortages in the state.