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## Health care translation company to start speaking telemedicine

Houston Business Journal - by [Monica Perin](#) Houston Business Journal

Fresh from accepting an award for its use of networking technology for language translation in medical settings, Houston-based **Language Assistance Telemedicine Inc.** is expanding the reach of its technology into telemedicine.

The company unveiled the use of its telemedicine technology at the Texas Medical Center on Oct. 17 for financial executives, and at the annual meeting of the Harris County Medical Society at Reliant Stadium on Oct. 20.

Language Assistance Telemedicine was just awarded \$15,000 worth of networking equipment and services by California-based IT networking giant Cisco Systems Inc., as one of 15 small and midsized businesses selected from nearly 600 applicants by a panel of technology experts.

Using trained medical professionals -- mostly doctors -- as interpreters, the company offers bedside video translation in 143 languages, including American Sign Language for the hearing impaired.

The technology connects a doctor and patient at one end with a translator at Language Assistance's Houston call center in the Texas Medical Center.

Now, Language Assistance Telemedicine plans to market its technology for use in telemedicine.

Simon Gongora, who founded the company in the 1990s, says the video equipment along with specialized peripheral tools can provide doctors with close-up images of affected body parts on a patient at a distant hospital.

He is working with Massachusetts-based AMD Telemedicine Inc., which makes a general examination camera with a built-in light source and auto zoom that can show detailed close-ups of body surfaces and internal places such as the throat.

"Language interpretation dovetails with telemedicine," says Dr. Deborah Jeffries, director of sales at AMD. "With language interpretation you get the verbal description, and with the camera you can see it and do a diagnosis. Then you need interpretive services to explain to the patient what will be done."

Gongora is currently meeting with financial analysts, venture capitalists and hospital administrators to "test the waters" for the telemedicine applications.

Meanwhile, he's adding more languages such as Russian and Chinese to the company's translation service, which is currently in use in more than 100 hospitals nationwide.

"They are getting a lot of interest in what they are offering," says Cisco spokesman Charles Sommerhauser. "A lot of emergency rooms are picking up on this videoconferencing at the point where patients need it most -- at the bedside."

### **Doctor is in**

Language Assistance Telemedicine's Houston clients include The Methodist Hospital System, The University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston, Park Plaza Hospital, St. Joseph Medical Center and Twelve Oaks Medical Center. Another client is Tennessee-based IASIS Healthcare Corp., which operates 15 hospitals in six states, including three in Texas.

Interest is also high among health care professionals at the nation's correctional institutions, says Gongora, who recently exhibited the company's technology at a national conference on correctional health care in Nashville.

Language Assistance Telemedicine competes with several national medical translation providers, including Columbus, Ohio-based Language Access Network Inc., which recently entered the Houston hospital market with its videoconference interpretation service. Language Access' service was implemented by Cypress-Fairbanks Medical Center in June.

But the Ohio company sells a turnkey videoconferencing system while Language Assistance offers software that is downloadable by hospitals and costs under \$1,000, Gongora says.

"Our system allows every computer in the hospital to become video-enabled rather than the hospital buying a big video system," he says.

The Language Assistance package includes a small camera, a speakerphone and a license to run the program.

Language Assistance has also partnered with LiveHire Communications, a pilot program launched this fall by two Baylor University students who plan to use the videoconferencing technology to enable Baylor nursing students to do face-to-face job interviews with hospitals from the school.

### **Language Assistance Telemedicine**

Headquarters: Houston

Founder: Simon Gongora

Business: Provides language translation services in medical settings. Gearing up to expand these services into the telemedicine arena.

Languages: 143

Number of hospital customers: 100

Local clients: The Methodist Hospital System, The University of Texas Medical Branch at

Galveston, Park Plaza Hospital, St. Joseph Medical Center and Twelve Oaks Medical Center.

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