

Surgeon-to-Surgeon Collaboration Transforms the Training Experience and Accelerates Adoption of XLIF Procedure

NuVasive is an innovation-based medical device company focusing on the design, development, and marketing of products for the surgical treatment of spine disorders. The company wanted to enrich the XLIF® procedure training experience for surgeons by encouraging peer-to-peer discussions. The company turned to Syndicom, the premier developer of collaborative communities, and its widely embraced SpineConnect platform – currently used by over 900 spine surgeons around the world. The new training process now incorporates Syndicom’s Technology Fellowship, which is built on the SpineConnect platform. Modeled after fellowship training programs in the real world, Syndicom’s virtual Technology Fellowship Group not only facilitates peer-based mentoring, but also provides a window for NuVasive into the nuances of the training experience. Thanks to Technology Fellowships, surgeons have an increased appreciation for the XLIF procedure and promote it among their colleagues. Now NuVasive has additional opportunities to modify their education, training and sales processes based on discussions taking place within the group.

Situation

NuVasive, based in San Diego, California, is committed to providing surgeons with a comprehensive portfolio of resources, which allows them to enhance their practices as they improve and fine-tune their surgical approaches and shorten their patients’ recovery cycles.

Nowhere is this commitment more evident than in the company’s approach to training. NuVasive devotes significant resources to training and educating surgeons regarding the safety and reproducibility of the XLIF® procedure. They maintain a state-of-the-art cadaver operating theatre, as well as a training facility at their corporate headquarters, which helps promote the adoption of this innovative procedure.

NuVasive also helped to create the Society of Lateral Access Surgery (SOLAS™) - a group of spine surgeons dedicated to the development and expanded application of lateral spine surgery techniques that offer significant patient benefits and improved clinical outcome through peer-to-peer communication, clinical education efforts, and research. NuVasive’s executives wondered if the company might be able to interest the SOLAS spine surgeon community into supporting its training process. “NuVasive recognizes that the best training occurs when a recognized expert trains his peers - because he is informed, trusted, and shares many of the same goals,” said Bryan Cornwall, vice president of Research and Clinical Resources.

Like many other medical device companies, NuVasive faced a significant challenge in its training process. The conversion rates for surgeons who had undergone training were not as high as NuVasive had hoped. They soon discovered that if a surgeon did not perform an XLIF surgery within the first few months of the on-site training, the odds were lower that they would use the technique. With the high training costs associated with each surgeon, losing even one is a significant expense. And because each surgeon represents a significant sales opportunity, the potential sales revenue loss is considerable. NuVasive needed a high-touch, personalized approach to fully engage their newly trained surgeons and convert them into long-term valuable customers.

“We were looking for a way to engage spine surgeons trained on XLIF, so that they would perform the operation within three months of their training, experience a successful patient outcome, and increase their comfort with performing more XLIF surgeries,” Cornwall said. “The bottom-line is that we needed these surgeons to feel comfortable using our procedure, instead of falling back on methods they were already familiar using,”

Solution

To address their needs, NuVasive approached Syndicom, Inc., the developers of Syndicom SpineConnect – the widely embraced online spine surgeon community that allows surgeons to collaborate on difficult and unusual cases.

For More Information

“Because of the phenomenal success of SpineConnect, we felt that Syndicom had a strong understanding about how surgeons collaborate and why peer-to-peer communication is so important,” said Pat Miles, NuVasive’s vice president of marketing. Working closely with NuVasive, Syndicom implemented a collaborative community environment for its consulting surgeons and those who were undergoing training at their San Diego facility.

Syndicom created the SOLAS XLIF Discussion Group, which was the very first private SpineConnect group focused on surgeon training for a specific device - and the precursor to the Technology Fellowship program. Technology Fellowships are based on the most successful peer-to-peer learning experience: Fellowship Programs. NuVasive places its experienced consulting surgeons, known as “Technology Fellowship Directors,” into XLIF Technology Fellowship Groups comprised of five to six surgeons who are undergoing training. These Fellowship Directors post instructional cases, review cases posted by surgeon fellows, and even allow these fellows to observe surgeries via the web.

For Technology Fellowship Directors, the ability to interact with their peers has been a very positive experience. Mark Peterson, medical director of Providence Spine Program and a NuVasive consulting surgeon, finds the collaboration tremendously valuable. “As an instructor, seeing the cases that surgeons encounter and participating in the discussion of how to approach a particular case has been very satisfying for me. This approach is highly personal, more engaging, and definitely more efficient for surgeon proctors. I get great feedback, and more importantly, I am personally involved in producing positive outcomes and preventing negative ones.”

NuVasive retains a link with the surgeons because the Technology Fellowship continues to function even after training is completed. According to Cornwall, “The first surgery is always the most difficult, so having access to experienced surgeons is critical to our overall success – both in terms of patient outcome and in the adoption of the XLIF procedure.”

Dr. Paul Slosar, a spine surgeon with SpineCare Medical Group, concurred. “The SOLAS XLIF Discussion Group

gave me the confidence to do my first surgery using the XLIF techniques. I posted my case, and within 24 hours I had more than a dozen responses on how to approach the case. That kind of feedback is extremely helpful to the surgeon before proceeding with surgery using a new technology.”

An unintended benefit to the process has been the ability for NuVasive to watch as a community of leading surgeons uses XLIF. For example, Slosar came across an XLIF case that was especially challenging, due to the particular patient’s petite size. After posting the case and receiving five responses, a NuVasive moderator chimed in with the information that there was indeed a product the company was developing to address such a situation. As a result, Slosar was able to use the prototype “special set” developed by the company, and the company received instant feedback that this type of case was not an isolated event. The product is now being made available to the surgeon community.

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Mark Peterson, M.D.
Providence Spine Program

“This type of situation shows how company loyalty is developed,” said Slosar. “A company that is responsive to my needs certainly earns my loyalty and makes me advocate for their devices. Without the SOLAS XLIF Discussion Group, I doubt that this would have happened.”

Benefits

The Syndicom solution has helped NuVasive retain a personal relationship with its surgeons long after the initial training has been completed, which encourages even more adoption of its XLIF procedure. Because of the SOLAS XLIF Discussion Group, surgeons are now able to engage in peer-to-peer discussions, thus raising their comfort level and confidence.

Higher Product Adoption Rate

Because surgeons have access to experienced surgeons post-training, NuVasive has achieved a faster adoption rate for the XLIF procedure. Surgeons encountering their first case finally have a built-in support system to overcome any concerns they have regarding a patient's treatment. Furthermore, because of this hands-on approach, proctors can turn potentially negative experiences into positive ones, which encourages more frequent use of the procedure.

Valuable Feedback

With the ability to view real-time discussions, and see how the surgeons are actually using the XLIF procedure, NuVasive has gained valuable insight into the nuances of the XLIF technique. Widening the indications, new technologies to support the procedure, and enhancing NuVasive support options are a few of the positive results derived from the SOLAS XLIF Discussion Group.

Enriched Training Process

NuVasive continues to differentiate itself from its competitors by embracing additional products and procedural innovations to support surgeons. By leveraging the many benefits of the SOLAS XLIF Discussion Group, NuVasive has provided a very successful and valuable addition to its training process. It completes the loop – providing a circular, integrated process from pre-training education to post-training follow-up, supporting on-going mentoring and enduring relationships with the surgeons.

Surgeon-to-Surgeon Viral Marketing

One of the unforeseen benefits of the SOLAS XLIF Discussion Group has been the promotion of the XLIF procedure on the SpineConnect platform. Surgeons who have completed their training, participate in the case discussions on the open SpineConnect platform that is

available to all spine surgeons. When the indications of a posted case fit the parameters for using the XLIF procedure, these trained surgeons suggest its use. This process not only results in more surgeons coming through the XLIF training, but also ensures that the procedure is used more often, when it is warranted.

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Paul Slosar, MD
SpineCare Medical Group

Syndicom Solutions for the Medical Device Industry

Medical device companies are under tremendous pressure to meet regulatory requirements, improve patient care, and reduce the time it takes to develop devices and take them to market. To meet this challenge, Syndicom has developed cost-effective solutions that enable medical device companies and surgeons to collaborate on education, training, research, and development to improve productivity and deliver collaborative solutions whenever and wherever it is needed. The result is enhanced productivity and improved patient outcomes.

For More Information

For more information about Syndicom products and services, call Syndicom at (970) 385-4250 or visit www.syndicom.com.

For more information about NuVasive products and services, call (800) 455.1476 or visit www.nuvasive.com.

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