

NCCMC gets \$1 million grant for technology

Telemedicine closes gap between patients, doctors

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North Colorado Medical Center will get a \$1 million federal boost in 2007 to upgrade its telehealth technology.

Telehealth technology allows a physician miles away to be virtually in the same room as the patient, while also having full access to the patient's medical information. The technology also allows the transmission of medical records as well as images such as X-rays and echocardiograms. It also can facilitate consultations using live video.

The money has been awarded to NCCMC through the 2007 Appropriations Bill, which was signed into law by President George W. Bush in October. It should be sent to NCCMC through the Telemedicine and Technology Research Center in Maryland.

NCCMC officials say telehealth technology has a profound impact on the quality of health care provided to Colorado residents, particularly those who live in rural communities, where going to see a medical specialist often involves traveling great distances. The funding of these technology upgrades will allow more data and video to move while minimizing patient travel time.

"The appropriations will allow hospitals throughout the region to raise the level of technology so that information and video will be able to be transmitted between communities more efficiently. It allows specialists in Greeley to be able to receive information about patients in another community without the

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patient or the physician having to travel," said Robert Thorn, administrator of ambulatory services at NCMC. "It allows information to be transmitted rather than patients."

This technology has existed in northern Colorado for more than 10 years. However, the existing technology needs improvements to keep up with the advances being made in health care. The existing system is limited by bandwidth restrictions. The federal funding will be used to expand the bandwidth, bringing all hospitals in the region up to a consistent standard for technology, security and accessibility.

"We are trying to make it so that any hospital can send data to any other hospital, and this is the first step," Thorn said.

The funding came with the help of Rep. Marilyn Musgrave, R-Colo., who worked to secure the money after seeing a live demonstration of the technology in August between NCMC and East Morgan County Hospital in Brush.

"We appreciate Congresswoman Musgrave's support of this request. It means that, eventually, we can bridge geographic barriers for both patients and physicians," said Gene O'Hara, CEO of NCMC. "This is a great step in using technology to bring medical providers together efficiently. Plus, it will allow for more health care to be provided in the patient's home community, under the direct coordination between their primary care providers and medical specialists."