

Doctors at a Distance

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By JON LANCE photographer@ssecho.com

The technology that allows a physician from anywhere in the country to view and diagnose a patient in Hopkins County is now available at Hopkins County Memorial Hospital. Memorial Hospital now has the capability to bring doctors from around the country via a computer with the telemedicine program. Internal medicine and cardiovascular disease physician Dr. Chris Gallagher brought this technology to Hopkins County. "A lot of the doctors in my group are based in the Dallas area," Gallagher said. "A natural way to bring their experience to Hopkins County is through telemedicine," Gallagher said. The program went live locally Nov. 1, 2013, starting with six patients and grew each month. March has so far been the busiest month using telemedicine as 53 patients were connected with neurology and pulmonary doctors over the internet. "The initial plan was to help ICU and critically ill patients overnight while the staff was limited," Gallagher said. Currently, the telemedicine program is being utilized 24 hours a day. To further the program, Memorial Clinic is digitizing all its medical records so that doctors using the telemedicine system can log onto a secure server and retrieve medical records, lab work and scan results immediately. Gallagher pulled a phone out of his pocket to use an example of the immediacy of the technology. Typically, it takes 30 to 45 minutes for a doctor to respond to an emergency if he is called at home. Gallagher's group, Onsite Physical Coverage Service, is researching a HIPPA-approved application, much like the iPhone "face-time," allowing doctors to quickly access the onsite telemedicine network to view what is going on in the ICU within a few minutes. Currently, doctors are using laptops with high definition cameras to access patients around the country. The technology of the telemedicine mobile hub in the hospital is comprised of easily found and replaceable items, a computer screen, touch pad tablet, omni-directional microphone, keyboard, mobile battery and speaker which is built onto a base with wheels for easy transport. "We wanted the interface be to as human-like as possible, for the patients to feel at ease," said Gallagher. The monitor will show the face of the doctor with real time audio and video correspondence with the patient through the speaker and microphone. The camera is a 360-degree motorized high definition camera in which the telemedicine doctor wirelessly controls from a keyboard. The camera will be able to read charts, blood and heart pressure monitor and be able to zoom in on patients to perform eye and mouth examinations. The machine is also built with a bluetooth-enabled stethoscope, which connects to a secure wireless network and transmits the heartbeat sound in real time directly to the doctor. Gallagher's group currently has 110 specialist doctors providing care around the country with the telemedicine program. "The program will add volume to the hospital, patients that would normally be sent in a helicopter or in an ambulance [elsewhere], will now be able to be rushed

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here and receive the same level of care,” said Gallagher. Staff Photo Jon Lance