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## Telemedicine: The doctor is in, just somewhere else

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On a normal day, it's just Vivienne Brunigis and Danny Fluke holding down the fort at Northside Clinic in Greeley Hill, 30 miles north of Mariposa.

The Dynamic Duo.

On Wednesday, Brunigis, the nurse practitioner, and Fluke, licensed vocational nurse, were joined by some 40 medical professionals throughout the San Joaquin Valley.

By television, that is.

The Greeley Hill clinic, an offshoot of the John C. Fremont Hospital in Mariposa, is part of UC Merced's new Valley Telehealth Partnership.

Brunigis explained that patients at the year-old clinic often travel down a winding, and sometimes dangerous, road to Modesto or UC Davis for medical treatments.

Now, she can ring up doctors at one of the partnership's six other sites for a second opinion or diagnosis.

Representatives from partnering institutions gathered at UC Merced on Wednesday to commemorate the beginning of the telemedicine program and give it a test run.

Maria Pallavicini, dean of the school of natural sciences, said the telemedicine system will improve access to physicians for residents throughout the Valley.

"I look at these six sites as just the beginning," Pallavicini said. "Our people living in this region are going to benefit tremendously."

The partnership -- funded by AT&T, the California Emerging Technology Fund and the California Partnership for the San Joaquin Valley -- could add as many as 20 sites next year, depending on the economy, project manager Jennifer Smith said.

San Joaquin Valley residents have the least access to physicians per capita of any region in California. On average, there are 302 physicians per 100,000 people in California. In the San Joaquin Valley, the number of physicians plunges to 173.

In a town like Greeley Hill: zero.

"As you can imagine, we are a very rural clinic," Brunigis said. "(Telemedicine) is extremely valuable because I am out here on my own."

Brunigis said the television network will finally allow her patients -- who range in age from birth to 102 -- to finally get medical assistance in their hometown. She said the clinic would use the partnership not only in emergency or specialty cases, but also just as an extra set of eyes as needed.

"We look forward to working with you," Brunigis said, signing off Wednesday's call and flipping off the Webcam.

The participating telemedicine sites are:

Castle Family Health Centers, Atwater

John C. Fremont Hospital Northside Clinic, Greeley Hill

National Health Services, Oildale

San Joaquin General Hospital, French Camp

Sierra Kings District Hospital, Reedley

United Health Center, Kerman

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### Merced Sun-Star

SUN-STAR PHOTO BY MARCI STENBERG Now one doesn't have to visit a specialist to receive special care. The UC Merced Valley Telehealth partnership helps physicians and patients in the San Joaquin Valley enjoy improved healthcare access through a growing network of telemedicine resource and technologies. A group of people got to see first hand through a network demonstration on how the telecommunication works, during a luncheon held at UC Merced, Wednesday, June 17, 2009 afternoon.