

California Telehealth Network to link centers

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Last week at the future Grand Central Station of the West (San Francisco's closed Transbay Terminal), we witnessed, with ceremonial shovels and earth, the groundbreaking for high-speed rail, touted by the nation's transportation secretary as a "really big deal."

On Tuesday, via webcast from the **UC Davis Cancer Center**, we were introduced, with the flip of a switch, to another major infrastructure project, the California Telehealth Network, heralded by Gov. **Arnold Schwarzenegger** as the "future of medicine."

It is certainly another highly ambitious project, if not quite so expensive or long in getting off the ground.

By 2011, the \$30 million project, funded primarily by the federal government, aims to digitally hook up 800 often hard-pressed health care facilities in rural and urban areas with the expertise and resources of university medical centers like those at UC Davis and **UCSF**.

As demonstrated at Tuesday's show-and-tell, the broadband network enables clinics and small hospitals to visually plug into a panoply of doctors, specialists and surgeons up to hundreds of miles away who can help check on patients in real time, go over X-rays and other diagnostic tests, and advise on procedures and drug treatments, even emergency measures.

"Being able to provide quality health care regardless of where the patient is located is the vision that drives us," **Eric Brown**, the project's executive director, said in a telephone interview.

It also speaks to some of the aims of health care reform. "What this is really about is to use broadband technology to improve clinical outcomes and reduce costs," said Brown, formerly a vice president at **Charter Communications Inc.**, the cable company once headed by Microsoft co-founder **Paul Allen**.

The project has received \$22 million from the **Federal Communications Commission**, which is looking to set up more telemedicine capabilities, especially in rural areas across the country. Other funders include the public-private **California Emerging Technology Fund** (www.cetfund.org); the **University of California**, which administers the project; and corporations ranging from **United Healthcare Corp.** to **AT&T Inc.**, the network's broadband contractor.

Aside from UCSF, the Bay Area is not part of the initial rollout of 50 sites statewide. However, 16 San Francisco Department of Health locations - notably including teen centers - in Chinatown, the Castro, the Haight and the Balboa neighborhood should be connected before Christmas, said Brown.

Others, in Oakland and Alameda County, the North Bay and Solano County, should follow sometime after, said a project spokesman.

More information on the California Telehealth Network can be found at www.caltelehealth.org.

-- President Obama's chief technology officer, **Aneesh Chopra**, who was at Tuesday's launch, will be talking more about it at noon today at San Francisco's **Commonwealth Club**, along with **Thomas Nesbitt** of UC Davis' School of Medicine (www.commonwealthclub.org).

Viva el sol: San Francisco is becoming quite the little hub for Spanish solar companies.

Abengoa Solar Inc. is the latest to set up shop in the city, moving its Western U.S. business development division and U.S. legal operations from Berkeley.

The company, a division of a Spanish multinational corporation headquartered in Seville, recently got a \$1.45 billion conditional loan guarantee from the Obama administration to help build the 250-megawatt Solana solar power plant in Arizona.

It also has a power purchase agreement with **PG&E Corp.** for an equally large solar plant to be built in the Mojave Desert.

"We feel that the Financial District in San Francisco is an ideal place to be located, given its proximity to some of our main clients and partners," explained **Santiago Seage**, Abengoa Solar's CEO.

Abengoa is the fourth Spanish solar company to plant its flag in San Francisco. **GA-Solar**, with 21 projects currently in the United States, Asia and Europe, established its U.S. headquarters in San Francisco in February. On its drawing board: a 300-megawatt solar plant in eastern New Mexico.

Fotowatio Renewable Ventures established its U.S. headquarters here after buying San Francisco's **MMA Renewable Ventures** for \$19 million in 2009. **Albiosa Corp.**, the U.S. subsidiary of Spain's Albiosa Solar, incorporated and set up its headquarters here the previous year. Its stateside projects include building solar power plants in Arizona and Hawaii.

One wonders what they all must be thinking of the sunless summer we've been having.

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