

UC San Diego School of Medicine Receives \$1 Million Telemedicine Learning Center Grant

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The University of California, San Diego School of Medicine has received a \$1 million grant from the California Telemedicine & eHealth Center (CTEC) to support the development and implementation of a Southern California Telemedicine Learning Center (TLC).

"This grant will build on the many ongoing efforts that are underway today, and enable us to expand training and outreach activities in telemedicine to a broad network of community partners," said David Brenner, M.D., UC San Diego vice chancellor for health sciences and dean of the School of Medicine. "Through the Telemedicine Learning Center, we will be able to bring innovations in telemedicine into medically underserved urban and rural communities, with the goal of improving health care for vulnerable patient populations."

In announcing the grant, CTEC noted that "(t)he mission of the UCSD School of Medicine encompasses a commitment of innovation, including training current and next-generation health care providers in the use of the latest technological advances for the delivery of health care in a variety of settings."

The Southern California TLC will be based on the UC San Diego campus, with training and Continuing Medical Education opportunities to be provided in remote sites. Co-directors are Lawrence Friedman, M.D., professor and director of ambulatory care for UCSD Medical Center, and Maria Savoia, M.D., vice dean for medical education and professor of medicine at the UCSD School of Medicine. Participating in the TLC are the UCSD Medical Center, the Department of Veterans Affairs Healthcare System, and CALIT2 (the California Institute for Telecommunication and Information Technology, based on the UC San Diego campus).

"This Center will be an important resource for our partners throughout the Southern California region," said Friedman. "UCSD's ability to reach out and provide education and training not only to our own students and trainees, but to community providers, will advance the application of new and developing telemedicine technologies in areas where access to quality care is limited due to geographic location or lack of available providers. As noted in the recent San Diego County study of the region's safety net of services, telemedicine is key to addressing health care disparities and closing the gap between those who have access to medical services, and those who do not."

A primary objective of the TLC is to work with health care organizations and providers in medically underserved Southern California communities to deliver state-of-the-art medical care with the support of telemedicine technologies.

One of the TLC's major partners will be the Community Clinics Health Network, which represents 17 community clinic corporations with over 70 locations in San Diego County. UCSD is currently working with the clinics to identify telemedicine education and training needs to enable clinics to build and implement telemedicine programs. An example of telemedicine in this arena is a project that allows Community Clinic providers access to the medical records of Clinic patients seen in the UCSD Medical Center Emergency Department, specialty clinics, or discharged from a UCSD hospital, to improve continuity of care for these patients. Telemedicine

networks also improve access for clinics in outlying and rural areas to specialists who can provide consultation and education. Another example of telemedicine in action is UCSD's STRoKE-DOC program, which provides long-distance consultation by UCSD stroke specialists to emergency rooms in San Diego and Imperial Counties using a wireless, interactive audiovisual tele-consultation technology.

The UCSD TLC will also work with the Imperial County School District to link providers with schools that lack adequate school health resources, especially for students with chronic medical conditions and moderate to severe disabilities. Telemedicine will help support school nurses and community physicians in caring for these students by linking providers and specialists to school sites.

A third aspect of the UCSD TLC program will focus on physicians in the UCSD Physician Assessment and Clinical Education Program (PACE). These are physicians whose competency has been questioned, usually by a state medical board, and who need evaluation and education in order to successfully return to practice. A high percentage of these physicians are primary care doctors who care for poor, underserved patient populations. A common issue among these physicians is that they tend to be solo practitioners who are not connected with colleagues or systems; by providing telemedicine training the TLC proposed to improve their access to current medical information and continuing education opportunities, which will improve the quality of care they deliver to their patients.

"We are very excited about moving forward with the Southern California TLC as we also gear up to more fully integrate telemedicine training into our medical school curriculum," said Savoia. "This technology will be an integral part of the medical practice of the future, so as we plan for a new medical education building on the School of Medicine campus, we need to ensure that it is fully equipped to incorporate telemedicine into our educational programs."

The UCSD School of Medicine is in the planning and fundraising stages of developing a new Telemedicine Education Building, in part to allow for expanded medical student enrollment through the new Program in Medical Education: Health Equity (PRIME-HEq) program. This new program will recruit additional students to the annual entering class of 122 medical students, and is designed specifically to train physicians to serve in underserved communities, with a telemedicine focus.

Until the new medical education building is constructed, the TLC program will be housed in a renovated building on the UCSD campus across from the school.

CTEC is a statewide organization dedicated to improving access to health care through innovative information technologies (eHealth). Funded through grants from the California Endowment, California HealthCare Foundation, Blue Shield of California Foundation and the Office of the Advancement of Telehealth, Health Resources and Services Administration, CTEC has invested more than \$20 million in projects to facilitate the growth of telemedicine and eHealth networks throughout the state.

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