

Teledoctor: Mixing Healthcare, Education And Technology

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By David Sentendrey, Digital Journalist



CHESTER, S.C. – Chester Elementary School is taking extra steps to make sure students are feeling well.

Chester is the guinea pig for a new way of treating sick students in South Carolina.

Here it is in a nutshell – when a child gets sick, they usually go to the school nurse’s office. That part remains the same. The addition – they now are conferenced in with a local doctor via computer.

“The Chester School District has an important role to play in promoting the health of our students,” explains Chester County School District’s Director of Exceptional Children Jeannie Ligon. “Telemedicine will provide the opportunity to build on our school-based health programs’ existing capacity to bring additional services to students.”

Dr. Sam Stone is that doctor. He grew up in Chester, married his high-school sweetheart and after college at Clemson University, came back to practice medicine.

His office is located just two miles from the school, but with this process, children are in-and-out of his office without ever actually coming in.

“This being a low-socioeconomic area, we hate when we have parents with jobs to have to come pick their kids up from school,” Stone said.

Stone sees around 80 patients a day. This program not only helps parents by not having to take off work for their children, it cuts down on waiting-room time and allows him to see more patients.

“We can pull them up on the computer screen,” Stone said. “They have an ear-probe where I can actually look at the eardrum. They have a stethoscope where I can listen to the breath sounds, heart sounds – make sure they’re not wheezing.

“It saves time, it saves money, it saves lost education time – it saves lost work time for the parents.”

And for the children – trying to get out of taking a test just got a bit harder with the doctor on call.

The telemedicine project, spearheaded by the Upper Midlands Rural Health Network (UMRHN), is based on a successful school project in Georgia. The network has secured a grant from the Chester Healthcare Foundation to purchase the exam peripherals (stethoscope and otoscope) needed to implement the program. Video conferencing company Polycom has agreed to loan the school district two telemedicine units.