



News Release
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**UAMS, Arkansas Department of Education Partner
to Implement \$1.2 Million Grant for School Telemedicine**

LITTLE ROCK — The University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences (UAMS) and the Arkansas Department of Education are partnering to implement a \$1.2 million pilot program that will provide telemedicine to students, educators and families in rural Arkansas communities.

School Telemedicine in Arkansas (STAR) is the first ever effort to bring telemedicine care to Arkansas' rural School-Based Health Centers with the intent to improve access to quality health care and address the unmet health needs of students and families. Decreased absenteeism and improved health outcomes are expected as a result.

The program will be funded by a \$1.2 million grant to the UAMS Center for Distance Health from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Services Administration.

The grant will be used to provide telemedicine equipment at four school districts that have existing school-based health centers: Jasper School District, Lee County School District, Malvern School District and Magazine School District. The Arkansas Department of Education will provide educational guidance throughout the project's development, as well as professional development for the districts.

STAR will provide students, faculty and families access to psychiatric, obesity prevention, and dental care via telemedicine. Through the program, patients can receive psychiatric medication checks, nutrition and exercise counseling on a one-on-one basis, and dental health care in their schools. As the infrastructure and connectivity for the STAR telemedicine network is built, services will be phased in beginning with psychiatric services in December 2016.

UAMS, Arkansas Department of Education to Implement \$1.2 Million Grant
Page 2

“What is learned during the STAR pilot project will shape clinical telemedicine care in school-based health centers, so in the future they can use the technology in the most effective ways,” said Curtis Lowery, M.D., Center for Distance Health director.

“Telemedicine continues expanding access in new ways like STAR, showing it can be a tool for achieving broad public health goals while addressing the health care needs of individuals.”

According to the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Arkansas ranks first in the nation for adult obesity and sixth for childhood obesity.

“The Arkansas Department of Education and UAMS, through STAR, will enhance services to students and their families to remove barriers impacting education and achievement,” said Jerri Clark, ADE’s School Health Services director and board member for the Arkansas Coalition for Obesity Prevention. “My hope is this project will close the gap between need and resources.”

In addition, according to the National Alliance for Mental Health, there are 31,000 children in Arkansas who have diagnosable mental health conditions.

“A large number of Arkansas children receiving mental health services receive those services within our school districts,” said Dr. Elizabeth Kindall, ADE’s school-based mental health specialist. “The STAR project will offer an avenue for students to have more efficient access to medication management and psychiatric services needed to not only improve student attendance but ultimately student performance in the classroom. We are working to simply remove barriers to access in addressing the needs of the whole child. STAR is a huge step toward that goal.”

In a recent assessment by the Arkansas Department of Health, 64 percent of Arkansas’ school-aged children had evidence of past or current cavities. Michael Zweifler, D.D.S., of Maumelle will act as a teledentistry consultant on the dentistry component and intervention.

Gordon Low, a family practice A.P.R.N. for women’s health in the UAMS Center for Distance Health, is the principal investigator on the grant. He has served as project director on two past HRSA grant-funded telehealth projects and has a professional background in family practice medicine.

“Together, UAMS, the Department of Education and the four school districts in the pilot program hope to demonstrate how telemedicine can be an effective means of addressing these needs so the program eventually may be expanded to help all Arkansas students who have them,” Low said.

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UAMS, Arkansas Department of Education to Implement \$1.2 Million Grant
Page 3

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UAMS

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