

**UAMS News Bureau**

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**News Release**  
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**UAMS Partners With Arkansas Blue Cross and Blue Shield  
to Expand Comprehensive Digital Health Network**

LITTLE ROCK — A \$1 million grant to the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences (UAMS) from Arkansas Blue Cross and Blue Shield will enable the UAMS Institute for Digital Health & Innovation to advance digital health statewide to provide patients better and more streamlined access to health care.

The grant was announced today as leaders from UAMS and Arkansas Blue Cross unveiled a digital health interpretive wall on the first floor of UAMS Medical Center. The interactive display will allow visitors to gain a better understanding of the benefits of digital technology and how it serves as an important tool for not only patient care, but for improved health and wellness

The support of Arkansas Blue Cross in the UAMS digital health initiative honors Mahlon O. Maris, M.D., for his nearly 50 years as a practicing primary care physician, providing quality care with great compassion in rural Arkansas.

Digital health delivers health care through technology such as smart phones, interactive live video, wearable devices and personal computers. It reduces the cost of health care and improves access for patients, especially in a largely rural state like Arkansas.

UAMS Chancellor Cam Patterson, M.D., MBA, who has made digital health a key component of his tenure, made the announcement with Curtis Barnett, Arkansas Blue Cross president and CEO, and Curtis Lowery, M.D., director of the UAMS Institute for Digital Health & Innovation.

“This initiative represents the next step for digital health in Arkansas,” said Patterson. “With the strong relationship UAMS has with Arkansas Blue Cross and Blue Shield, we can be true innovators for digital health in this state. By improving access for patients, especially those in rural and underserved areas in Arkansas, we can provide care to people wherever they live, whenever possible.”

“Health care in Arkansas, and throughout the United States and beyond, is experiencing amazing advances in technology and innovation, but we also see huge disparity as to who can access and afford health care, especially in rural areas,” said Barnett. “Arkansas Blue Cross and Blue Shield believes care innovations, including digital health, can help all Arkansans live healthier lives.

“We are proud to support this initiative and especially pleased that it honors Dr. Maris, an Arkansas Blue Cross board member whose service, leadership, knowledge and experience has helped guide our company’s efforts to assist in shaping the future of health care in Arkansas.”

Lowery has nurtured digital health applications in Arkansas over the last 30 years, culminating in creation this year of the Institute for Digital Health & Innovation. The institute already connects many hospitals and clinics across the state through interactive video to provide care for high-risk pregnancy, stroke and other health needs.

“With this investment from Arkansas Blue Cross we can accelerate using digital technology to integrate patient care into people’s daily lives,” he said. “UAMS is developing a revolutionary infrastructure atop existing clinical, educational and research areas to support digital urgent care and triage, as well as digital primary and specialized care. By connecting digitally, we can communicate better and reduce costs.”

The first phase of the plan will focus on urgent care. Patients will be able to consult with a medical professional by phone or live video on their phone to determine whether they need immediate care and how to obtain follow-up care. A digital provider will be able to treat significantly more patients and can treat patients throughout the state.

Phase Two will develop ways to provide primary care and certain specialized care, such as gynecology, ophthalmology, gastroenterology, oncology and orthopaedics.

The services should be available for the public in early 2021, allowing UAMS time to establish the technology infrastructure and training programs necessary for a full digital interprofessional education and health care delivery center.

None of that would be possible without the critically important \$1 million investment from Arkansas Blue Cross, which has long supported UAMS programs.

Since the institute’s inception in February, it has been distributing software and technology to patients so they can take part in live video consultations 24 hours a day, seven days a week with physicians and other health care professionals.

At least 64% of patients use a digital device to manage health, and 66% of millennials are interested in managing their health on mobile devices, according to 2017 surveys.

The institute can expand on existing relationships between UAMS and rural hospitals to provide access to medical specialties that aren’t in those communities. Increased access to specialists can reduce health care costs by reducing the need to transfer patients from rural hospitals to larger medical centers such as UAMS where those specialists often are more commonly practicing.

These changes will help move toward compensating providers for positive health outcomes rather than the now predominant, fee-for-service model. This will result in

fewer hospitalizations, shorter hospital stays and fewer Emergency Department visits. Cost savings are then shared with providers.

The Institute for Digital Health & Innovation also provides continuing medical and health education, public health education, and evaluation research through interactive video.

Founded in 1948, Arkansas Blue Cross and Blue Shield, an independent licensee of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association, is the largest health insurer in Arkansas. Arkansas Blue Cross and its affiliates have more than 2,900 employees. The Blue Cross Blue Shield Association is comprised of 36 independent, community-based and locally operated Blue Cross and Blue Shield Plans that collectively provide healthcare coverage for nearly 106 million members – one in three Americans.

UAMS is the state's only health sciences university, with colleges of Medicine, Nursing, Pharmacy, Health Professions and Public Health; a graduate school; hospital; a main campus in Little Rock; a Northwest Arkansas regional campus in Fayetteville; a statewide network of regional campuses; and seven institutes: the Winthrop P. Rockefeller Cancer Institute, Jackson T. Stephens Spine & Neurosciences Institute, Harvey & Bernice Jones Eye Institute, Psychiatric Research Institute, Donald W. Reynolds Institute on Aging, Translational Research Institute and Institute for Digital Health & Innovation. It is the only adult Level 1 trauma center in the state. *U.S. News & World Report* named UAMS Medical Center the state's Best Hospital; ranked its ear, nose and throat program among the top 50 nationwide; and named six areas as high performing — cancer, colon cancer surgery, heart failure, hip replacement, knee replacement and lung cancer surgery. UAMS has 2,727 students, 870 medical residents and five dental residents. It is the state's largest public employer with more than 10,000 employees, including 1,200 physicians who provide care to patients at UAMS, its regional campuses, Arkansas Children's Hospital, the VA Medical Center and Baptist Health. Visit [www.uams.edu](http://www.uams.edu) or [www.uamshealth.com](http://www.uamshealth.com). Find us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [YouTube](#) or [Instagram](#).

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