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UAMS-Housed Regional Telehealth Resource Center Receives \$825,000 to Support Health Care Providers with Digital Health

LITTLE ROCK — The South Central Telehealth Resource Center at the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences (UAMS), has received \$825,000 in federal funding to expand digital health education and support for health care providers in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic.

“We are excited to use these funds to expand our technical assistance, outreach and education to help people in these difficult times,” said Hari Eswaran, Ph.D., the center’s director. “We serve everyone from the rural physician who is trying to provide digital health for the first time, to the seasoned digital health provider trying to navigate the many regulatory changes during the COVID-19 pandemic.”

The center, within the UAMS Institute for Digital Health & Innovation, covers Arkansas, Tennessee and Mississippi and is part of the National Consortium of Telehealth Resources Centers. Twelve regional and two national Telehealth Resources Centers provide assistance, education and information to organizations and individuals who are providing or interested in providing health care at a distance. They target underserved populations, and most of the assistance they provide is free.

The grant comes from the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), part of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The funding is part of the coronavirus relief bill, the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act.

Digital health is a broad term that includes services like providing medical care over videoconference. It encompasses a range of efforts to update medical care to harness the power of technology, from mobile phones to wearable health devices to digital sharing of health information.

During the new coronavirus pandemic, in-person care was limited so many health care providers were forced to implement digital health strategies in a matter of weeks to safely screen patients for COVID-19 and to continue serving other patients. The federal guidelines governing how care is delivered also changed, in most cases loosening up restrictions such as whether providers could use their cell phones or video services like

Skype or Zoom. Many providers were also confronted with questions about how to bill and be compensated for digital health services.

Eswaran said the additional funding is significant. The center typically receives about \$325,000 annually and has a handful of staff who provide trainings, consolidate the latest resources for online access and provide one-on-one guidance to health care providers on digital health topics. Resources are available in a variety of formats: documents, videos, webinars, podcasts and more. They provide consults online, over the phone, and — before COVID-19 — in person.

“We have seen an exponential growth in requests for our services as we help both newcomers and more established users navigate the near-daily changes in how they can provide digital health care,” Eswaran said. “By a number of measures, our work has doubled or tripled.”

For example, in March the center provided one-on-one consults to 412 people, compared to about 200 in March 2019 and less than 100 in March 2018. Requests for technical assistance exceeded 130 in March, compared to just 40 in 2019. The technical assistance staff provided over 532 hours on research and client responses and developed resources like the Telehealth Assistance for Providers page to help health care providers adopt and implement telemedicine as part of their COVID-19 response.

“April will outpace that,” Eswaran said. “We are getting requests from beyond our region as well. Providers nationwide are navigating these questions, and we’re happy to be able to help and have the funding support to do so.”

For more information about the National Consortium of Telehealth Resource Centers, visit www.telehealthresourcecenter.org. For COVID-19 content, visit www.telehealthresourcecenter.org/covid-19-resources. To access webinars, podcasts and other resources by the South Central Center, visit www.learntelehealth.org.

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. UAMS includes UAMS Health, a statewide health system that encompasses all of UAMS’ clinical enterprise including its hospital, regional clinics and clinics it operates or staffs in cooperation with other providers. UAMS 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 or www.uamshealth.com. Find us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [YouTube](#) or [Instagram](#).

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