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Office of Communications & Marketing  
4301 West Markham # 890  
Little Rock, AR 72205-7199

[uamshealth.com/news](http://uamshealth.com/news)



**News Release**  
**Oct. 15, 2020**

**Media Contacts:**

Leslie W. Taylor, 501-686-8998  
Wireless phone: 501-951-7260  
[leslie@uams.edu](mailto:leslie@uams.edu)

Liz Caldwell, 501-686-8995  
Wireless phone: 501-350-4364  
[liz@uams.edu](mailto:liz@uams.edu)

**UAMS Researcher Awarded \$500,000 to Study  
Quality of Digital Care**

LITTLE ROCK – The University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences (UAMS) has been awarded \$500,000 by the Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute (PCORI) to study the quality of digital health visits for older patients.

The funding is a supplemental award to a \$4 million study funded last year to directly compare digital delivery of health care to standard in-person visits for patients with heart failure.

“The adoption of digital health tools has skyrocketed during the COVID-19 pandemic, but there’s not a lot of good evidence on how well they really work, especially for older patients who are often already really sick, like heart failure patients,” said Leanne Lefler, Ph.D., APRN, an associate professor in the UAMS College of Nursing. “The science has just not kept pace.”

The research, conducted by the College of Nursing, in cooperation with West Tennessee Healthcare and the support of the UAMS Institute for Digital Health & Innovation, will survey 1,000 heart failure patients to determine quality of care and patient satisfaction with digital visits in the past year.

“These are all older, frailer patients who need to see a care provider frequently,” added Lefler. “We want to determine whether they feel digital care during the pandemic has met their needs. During the pandemic, we rapidly switched to digital care delivery because in-person visits were not available, but we don’t really know how well those visits are working for these patients. So we want to ask them.”

The survey will augment Lefler’s original study, which will divide participants into groups receiving either digital care or in-person care and will track their health and compare things like emergency interventions over a six-month period. Both sets of patients will receive tools to monitor their health in real time throughout the study.

“Many of these patients often struggle to travel, so digital health seems to offer better ease of access, but not without its own barriers like technical difficulties or lack of technology or connectivity,” said Lefler.

“There’s a lot we can learn here. During the pandemic, many care providers have received a waiver to classify patient contact, including some phone calls, as a digital health visit. Investigating how much patients have benefitted from those practices can help us in evaluating long-term policy,” she added.

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 — COPD, colon cancer surgery, heart failure, hip replacement, knee replacement and lung cancer surgery. UAMS has 2,876 students, 898 medical residents and four 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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