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SDBJ Poll

President Obama signed the economic stimulus bill one year ago. What's your opinion of the \$787 billion program?

- It's a needed economic boost.
- It's a boondoggle.
- It's somewhere in between.

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Dream of something more than fighting your way into middle management

Posted date: 2/22/2010

Telehealth Network to Virtually Link Remote, Metro Caregivers Statewide

TECHNOLOGY: FCC Pledges \$22.1M To Facilitate the Broadband Connection

By HEATHER CHAMBERS

SAN DIEGO BUSINESS JOURNAL STAFF

A few years from now, hospitals and clinics serving patients in remote areas of San Diego County will be able to connect with major medical centers across the state.

An initiative known as the California Telehealth Network will join more than 300 California health care providers in underserved areas to a state and nationwide broadband network dedicated to health care.

Among the San Diego-based clinics participating in the telemedicine initiative are the San Diego American Indian Health Center, the 12 locations of the Family Health Centers of San Diego, the seven locations of Neighborhood HealthCare, five locations for Mountain Health & Community Services Inc. and seven Clinicas de Salud del Pueblo Inc. sites in Imperial County.

The Federal Communications Commission will provide California with up to \$22.1 million over three years to deploy the network, and organizations such as the San Francisco-based California Emerging Technology Fund have committed \$3.6 million on top of that.

"It is a huge opportunity to transform the delivery of health care," said Sunne Wright McPeak, president and CEO of the California Emerging Technology Fund, created in 2006 as a condition of AT&T Inc. and Verizon Communications Inc.'s merger to expand broadband into underserved areas. "Perhaps there's not a neonatal specialist but a general practitioner doing the obstetrics or pediatric care. Now, somebody presents at the clinic in distress. They can, at UC San Diego or at the state level or the rest of the world, immediately get someone care."

Gary Rotto, health policy director of the San Diego Council of Community Clinics, said a handful of the organization's 16 member clinics already have telemedicine systems in place. Going forward, he said he's concerned about the reimbursement process and whether member clinics will receive their fair share.

"If the specialist at the other end is independent, the question is: Who gets the reimbursement and how is it divided?" he said.

Connie Kirk, executive director of the Imperial Beach Health Center, which serves mostly uninsured and low-income people living in the South Bay, said the center has explored telemedicine but hasn't made any major commitments.



Photo courtesy of Encore Capital Group Brandon Black, CEO of Encore Capital Group, reports the number of his competitors has dwindled.

WEEKLY EDITION

February 22-28, 2010



Peering Through The Clouds

High-flying, unmanned spy planes have the media's attention. Impressive as those aircraft might be, however, they are nothing without the specialized instruments that grab images to be transmitted back to the United States.

Telehealth Network to Virtually Link Remote, Metro Caregivers Statewide

A few years from now, hospitals and clinics serving patients in remote areas of San Diego County will be able to connect with major medical centers across the state.

Encore Capitalizing On Consumers' Credit Card Woes

The recent trend in more consumers paying off their debt and getting their financial houses in order worries the folks at San Diego-based Encore Capital Group Inc., a collector of charged-off credit card debt.

Stimulus Bill Helps Spur Demand for SBA Loans

While many banks are hunkering down, dealing with more problem loans, and being more careful about lending, lenders providing loans guaranteed by the U.S. Small Business Administration are seeing increased activity.

WEEKLY EDITION

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MINTZ LEVIN

"Telehealth is really good for psychiatry but a lot of the specialties, we've been told, aren't really amenable to it," she said. "If there gets to be specialists that can provide good services, we'd certainly relook at it."

Vendor Selection

The University of California is expected to announce its vendor for the Telehealth Network this week, a major step in jump-starting the process of connecting clinics and hospitals in rural communities and underserved urban neighborhoods.

The UC system will manage the first phase of the project's development on behalf of a consortium of state agencies, health care and broadband providers and foundations. Earlier this month, UC Irvine announced that it would open a telemedicine training center as part of its \$40.5 million medical education building.

Federal government funds in the way of the economic stimulus package are also pending announcement at the end of February.

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