

News

VIDEO DIAGNOSIS ENABLING SAN JOAQUIN GENERAL TO EXPAND

By **Joe Goldeen**
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Record Staff Writer

FRENCH CAMP - Telemedicine, the use of a secure video link by a medical specialist in one location to examine the condition of a patient in another location, is taking hold at San Joaquin General Hospital.

In a big way.

With a limited number of physician specialists available 24 hours a day, the county's public hospital has been able to expand its services in such areas as neurology, dermatology and critically important eye examinations for diabetic patients.

These services were highlighted during a quick visit and hospital tour this week by a delegation of California Assembly members, including Speaker John Pérez, D-Los Angeles, and Assemblywoman Cathleen Galgiani, D-Livingston.

"I'm very aware of telemedicine," Perez said, adding that he views it as one solution to help make the safety-net hospital more financially viable while at the same time providing some of the county's poorest residents with access to medical specialists.

Galgiani, who prior to her political career was a physical therapy aide at San Joaquin General, said when she worked with stroke patients, there was no such thing as teleneurology.

"Teleneurology allows them to intervene before a person's condition worsens. It allows them to ensure a much greater level of care," Galgiani said, noting that every minute counts when a patient has suffered a stroke.

Hospital administrator David Culberson hosted the pre-election delegation that also included Assembly members Steven Bradford, D-Gardena; Mary Hayashi, D-Hayward; Fiona Ma, D-San Francisco; and Nancy Skinner, D-Berkeley.

Culberson said San Joaquin General uses teleneurology to access a network of on-call neurologists, sending brain images of the stroke patient taken by the hospital's high-speed CT scanner.

"The neurologist evaluates the patient's condition and the appropriateness of the intervention," Culberson said.

Two years ago, San Joaquin General was selected from among 170 facilities by the University of California, Merced, to be one of five initial sites in the Valley Telehealth Partnership with grant funding of nearly \$1 million from AT&T, the California Emerging Technology Fund and the California Partnership for the San Joaquin Valley.

The hospital's telemedicine program launched one year later following staff training and the installation of video equipment and network connections. Many of the specialists the program accesses are with University of California hospitals and clinics in Sacramento, San Francisco and Berkeley. The teleneurology program uses physicians from Specialists on Call.

Contact reporter Joe Goldeen at (209) 546-8278 or jgoldeen@recordnet.com. Visit his blog at recordnet.com/goldeenblog.