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Data network to improve health care

Nov 28, 2007 @ 03:00 PM

BusinessRockford.com

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A group of health-care providers and universities that includes SwedishAmerican and FHN Memorial hospitals announced the creation today of a statewide fiber-optic network to improve rural health care.

The Illinois Rural HealthNet Coalition will receive a \$21 million federal grant to create a network that will give small-town doctors access to specialists around the state for diagnosis, treatment and even real-time consultation in emergency cases. The coalition is led by Northern Illinois University.

When complete, the network will extend from Galena to Metropolis, serving 80 small towns and larger communities, such as Rockford and DeKalb. It will include 85 hospitals and clinics but could be expanded.

The network is expected to go online for the northern half of the state within 18 months, with full implementation in three years.