



Federal grant to help connect doctors, rural patients

GATEHOUSE NEWS SERVICE

Thursday, November 29, 2007

A \$21 million federal grant will help link patients and physicians in rural Illinois to urban health-care providers and specialists.

The three-year grant from the Federal Communications Commission to the Illinois Rural Health Care Consortium will support a high-speed fiber optic and wireless network connecting 88 locations throughout the state. It is a pilot program that eventually could grow larger.

The network will help provide "decent health care for everybody, no matter where they live," Lt. Gov. Pat Quinn said Wednesday at a Statehouse news conference.

The speed that voice and images will be transmitted through the new technology "takes it to a very different level," said Alan Kraus, executive director of

the Broadband Development Group at Northern Illinois University, one of the partners in the consortium.

For instance, an emergency room physician in a small rural hospital could consult with a specialist in Chicago, along with sending MRI images and other data-laden material within seconds.

The consortium consists of about a dozen major health-care providers and research universities across the state.