

CAMPUS

NIU-led group receives \$21 million

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A \$21 million government grant has been given to an NIU-led coalition.

The Illinois Rural HealthNet Coalition is an NIU-led group consisting of a number of universities around Illinois. The group will create a fiber-optic grid across Illinois allowing smaller, rural hospitals to contact larger hospitals to provide care for their patients, according to an NIU press release.

Currently, if a person is in need of medical help, rural hospitals may not be able to provide the specific care for them and they may need to be transferred to a larger hospital. This new system will allow rural hospitals to receive the aid of experts who are hundreds of miles away, and the fiber-optic system would shorten the time diagnostic tests such as CT scans and MRIs can be transferred from days to minutes, according to the release.

Illinois Senator Barack Obama stressed a need for a system such as HealthNet for Illinois' rural communities in a letter to Kevin J. Martin, Federal Communications Commission chairman.

"Too often, those in rural communities do not have the access to necessary medical services in a timely manner," Obama wrote. "Despite the fact that one-fourth of the population in the United States live in rural areas, only about 10 percent of the nation's doctors practice in rural areas."

The system will connect more than 85 health care locations, including NIU, College of Medicine at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Southern Illinois University School of Medicine and Mennonite College of Nursing at Illinois State University, according to the release.