

## From 3 hours to 3 seconds

### Illinois Rural Health Net offers rapid speeds to transfer patient health care information

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STERLING – A federally funded project to expand high-speed broadband is helping patients get better health care in rural cities across the state.

Among the hospitals that are benefiting from the expansion are CGH Medical Center in Sterling and KSB Hospital in Dixon.

Thanks to a \$23 million federal grant, rural Illinois hospitals and clinical practices are being connected through a 3,100-mile fiber-optic network, said Roger Holloway, president and CEO of Illinois Rural Health Network.

Northern Illinois University was the grant applicant. Holloway, who is based in DeKalb, manages the network.

“Everyone’s had the Internet,” he said. “Especially in rural settings, many times they don’t have lots of speed. This project is going to be critical for information.”

The intent of the project was to “get appropriate speeds of broadband to health care organizations throughout Illinois,” Holloway said.

The government was willing to build infrastructure that allows information to move at a rapid pace.

“A hospital downstate that would transfer images from a pediatric echocardiogram, [it would take] 3 hours to transfer to Springfield,” he said. “Three hours now goes to 3 seconds.”

#### Local impact

KSB went live with the high-speed network connection at the start of the year, said Dave Ginn, the hospital's director of information systems.

“This gives us a high-capacity connection that’s limited to just health care institutions,” Ginn said. “It lets us talk to any other Illinois hospital that chooses to jump on.”

Dave Schreiner, KSB’s CEO and president, said the technology is in the early stages of what it eventually will do.

“It’s all about connecting health care facilities and the speed with which we can move data,” Schreiner said.

In July, construction will begin on a new intensive care unit at the Dixon hospital. Among the possibilities are the inclusion of an electronic ICU, Schreiner said.

“Our patients would have the ability to be monitored ... off-site,” he said. “Specialists off-site [could] make recommendations that improve that patients’ care.”

The hospital must decide in the next few months whether the eICU will be a part of the new construction.

"The technology is there; the infrastructure is there," Schreiner said. "The decision comes to whether we do that in house. The network helps us if we go that direction."

Dr. Paul Steinke, CGH Medical Center president and CEO, said the high-speed network has great potential for improving health care. The hospital has been hooked up to the "high-speed highway" for 6 months, he said.

Because the speed within the network is so much greater, the sharing of patient information is much quicker, he said.

"The hope is that one day, their information will be available throughout the northern Illinois area," he said. "All of this is important infrastructure in making that a reality."

### **'A huge game changer'**

In terms of access to care, the broadband network is "a huge game changer," Holloway said.

New facilities also are being added to the network. In addition, the goal is to link nursing homes to the network.

If it costs \$100,000 to connect to a hospital, the federal government pays 85 percent through the fund, Holloway said.

"You now have speeds they would never have thought of," he said. "The staff doesn't have to leave town. Suddenly delivered in real time.

"The impact on infrastructure of Illinois is significant."

### **On the web**

For more information on the Illinois Rural Health Network, visit [illinoisruralhealthnet.org/irhn/](http://illinoisruralhealthnet.org/irhn/).

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