

Dates of Activity: July 2008 through September 2008  
**Seed Grant:** Valley Telehealth Partnership  
**Grantee Organization:** School of Natural Sciences, University of California, Merced  
**Contact Person:** Maria Pallavicini PhD  
**Phone:** 209.228.2969  
**Email:** mpallavicini@ucmerced.edu

### Description of Quarter's Activity/Impact on Partnership

1. **Marketing Plan Developed.** Subcontractors hired to formulate franchise style marketing plan for Valley Telehealth Partnership (VTP) sites including: design, copy and branding; project includes hard copy brochures, mailers and tool-based networking web site. Materials will be printed in multiple languages, including English, Hmong, Spanish and Laotian. Marketing materials and web design developed and in production.
2. **Equipment Received and Assembled.** Polycomm units and peripherals received; ready for placement once connectivity is completed at each site.
3. **Partnership Agreement Developed.** Equipment Use/ VTP Legal Agreement developed outlining partnership guidelines/expectations. Includes VTP expectations for data collection to evaluate program success, requirements for insurance, maintenance and service on equipment, etc.
4. **Connectivity.** Work contracted with Rural Health Telecomm (RHT). Connectivity plan is developed; routers and equipment selected and purchased; site line orders placed. Sites now pending individual connection over the next few weeks. RHT to maintain network service for these sites/lines for the next two years.
5. **Specialty Site Training.** Specialty sites to attend expert consultative training at Open Door Community Health Center in Arcata, Calif., to assist in developing their specialty telemedicine programs. Once sites are connected and equipped, training for operation will begin on-site.
6. **Specialties Identified.** Expected specialties to be offered at two VTP specialty sites include: dermatology, orthopedics, neurology, emergency OB, neonatology, rheumatology, psychology, and pediatrics.
7. **Public Relations.** Articles published in the Fresno Bee and the Fresno Business Journal highlighting the VTP project for increased public awareness.
8. **Stakeholder Meetings.** Meetings held with Blue Cross, California Rural Health Coalition, UC Irvine and Med RT to discuss the best ways to proceed with telemedicine collaboratively in the San Joaquin Valley.

### Planned Activities for next 3-6 months:

Completion and implementation of project at initial 6 selected sites, including:

1. Finish up connecting/equipping sites
2. Begin onsite training on development of customized programs
3. Support sites as they go "live" with patients
4. Flesh out web site with multiple user tools, educational links, networking tools, etc.
5. Conduct community telemedicine days to introduce telemedicine to local user communities
6. Schedule CME programs for each site
7. Offer grand round sessions and VTP community meetings with UC Merced as hub site/organizer

### Challenges/Problems/Bottlenecks/Feedback

The budget crisis in California last quarter had severe implications at all of our sites as payments for their services were completely stopped for nearly three months. This led to payroll and supply issues, including food and pharmaceutical supply breakdowns. During this crisis, all of our facilities refocused their resources and attention to more critical operational matters in order to survive.

As our partners temporarily took their attention away from implementing new telemedicine programs, we shifted our focus from site implementation into areas such as the marketing plan and VTP web site development. Now that the budget stalemate has passed, implementation work is moving ahead swiftly at the sites.

Setbacks also occurred during our selection of connectivity planning, as most options from vendors were too expensive for our sites to maintain. RHT is a smart solution for these sites as they offer discounting on connection, equipment and maintenance, making it more affordable to sustain.

Telemedicine should serve the VTP sites very well under the currently strained financial situation, as long as costs are contained. Greater service area outreach (specialists) combined with local access (at originating sites) for rural communities has the potential to cut costs for both patients and facilities. However, we will continue to anticipate further distractions in coming months as the industry adapts to tighter funding environments, lower reimbursement rates, and state budgetary shortfalls.

We anticipate that by funding deadline Dec. 31, 2008, all sites will be providing services to patients and accessing continuing medical education programs using the equipment. In addition, some targeted marketing and educational outreach events will have taken place (as sites become equipped) to raise awareness and encourage program use.

Due to many unforeseen setbacks in our original time line, a no-cost extension of this funding through June 30, 2009, would allow UC Merced to provide a higher level of ongoing support to these newly equipped telemedicine sites in the areas of program development, staff training and outreach. Such consideration would be highly advantageous to the San Joaquin Valley Telehealth Initiative and would support the larger, statewide efforts to expand telemedicine via the California Telehealth Network (CTN), which is expected to be put into place during the next 6 to 12 months.