

Temple Hosts Telemedicine Clinics for Shriners Hospitals Patients



The establishment of a telemedicine clinic at Akdar Shriners' temple allows children to continue receiving top-notch care while alleviating the growing cost of transporting patients to Shriners Hospitals.

Akdar Shriners in Tulsa, Okla., utilizes the latest technology to make Shriners Hospitals for Children accessible for patients in the area.

Across North America, thousands of Shriners volunteer to transport patients to and from Shriners Hospitals for treatment. But the rising cost of gasoline is making weekly trips by van or plane an expensive endeavor. This challenge led Akdar Shriners to find a more economical alternative: establishing telemedicine technology at their temple.

Telemedicine allows doctors to provide medical care to patients in a remote location through interactive video and an audio connection. In 2004, Akdar Shriners became the first of 191 Shriners temples to house a telemedicine suite within its building. The project began with a partnership with Shriners Hospitals for Children — Shreveport and has since expanded to the Shriners Hospitals in Galveston and St. Louis.

“It’s very rewarding to know how all this got started: it was just a simple idea to help defray the costs of transportation,” said Ken Hunter, hospital committee chairman for Akdar Shriners and a member of the Shreveport Shriners Hospital Board of Governors. “It’s been a tremendous

joy to work with these kids. And, of course, parents are appreciative because it saves them from missing so much work. Instead of a two-day trip to one of our Shriners Hospitals, they can come here for two hours and then go home.”

Equipment and supplies for the telemedicine suite were donated by the Oklahoma State University College of Osteopathic Medicine and University of Oklahoma College of Medicine, Tulsa. The sophisticated equipment includes a videoconferencing system with two 17-inch LCD monitors, a hand-held camera for up-close viewing and a special camera for gait analysis, which allows physicians and patients to communicate in real-time.

“We use high-resolution cameras that can show the accurate color of a burn or incision, and can go inside the mouth of a cleft palate patient,” Hunter explained. “It’s especially great for cleft palate patients, who need so much follow-up. If it weren’t for us, they’d be making frequent trips to Chicago.”

A secure high-speed Internet connection is used to download quality video and share supporting materials, such as patient records, charts and X-rays. During weekly Friday telemedicine clinics, volunteer medical professionals are available to provide basic medical care for patients. For example, nurses may apply ointment and redress burns after patients consult with a doctor at the Galveston Shriners Hospital, or an orthotics technician may take measurements for a doctor in Shreveport.

Several other temples are following the lead of Akdar Shriners. To help those interested in starting a similar program, Akdar Shriners partnered with Oklahoma State University to create a DVD about their telemedicine suite, and encourage Shriners to visit their temple in Tulsa.

To learn more about the telemedicine program at Akdar Shriners, contact Ken Hunter at (918) 836-2528 or hospital@tulsacoxmail.com.



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