

Doctor analysing information on various computer screens in a hospital

# PROJECT ECHO

**HELPING THE TREATMENT OF DISEASES IN RURAL AND UNDERSERVED AREAS.**

*By University of New Mexico School of Medicine*

Project URL: [echo.unm.edu](http://echo.unm.edu)

Project Twitter: [@ProjectECHO](https://twitter.com/ProjectECHO)

Organisation URL: [som.unm.edu](http://som.unm.edu)

Organisation Twitter: [@@UNM](https://twitter.com/@@UNM)

- Community Engagement
- Health
- Audiovisual
- Data
- Social Software

In 2002, Sanjeev Arora, a physician at the University of New Mexico Hospital and one of the few hepatitis specialists in the state, became increasingly frustrated with his inability to provide care to the thousands of New Mexicans who suffer from hepatitis C.

Arora could treat only about 70–90 hepatitis C patients per year in his clinic, yet there were more than 30,000 people with the disease in the state. There was a six month waiting list to see him. Treating hepatitis C is a complicated, drawn-out process; very few physicians in New Mexico have the expertise required, because it takes many years to learn.

Most of the people Arora treated lived near Albuquerque, or could afford to travel to see a specialist once a month for their regular consultation. In rural and medically underserved areas, people were cut off from decent care, especially those lacking private health insurance.

Arora developed Project ECHO (Extension for Community Healthcare Outcomes) to spread capacity, to safely and effectively treat chronic, common and complex diseases in rural and underserved areas.

Medical expertise is often based in urban, university research hospitals where doctors work together and learn from one another, through ward rounds and comparing patient notes. Rural doctors, often working in isolation, lack access to a community that would provide them with feedback and advice. As a result their expertise develops far more slowly.

Project ECHO aims to overcome that isolation with a simple video conferencing programme that allows doctors to talk to one another and to learn from one

another's experience of dealing with different cases. Through social networking it links doctors together over 20 rural sites to create a virtual peer community to promote feedback and learning. The first studies of the ECHO clinics found that they had closed the gap in performance when compared with clinics based at the main hospital in Albuquerque.

*Image 'Telemedicine Consult' courtesy of Intel Free*

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