# National Public Health Week

### Creating the Healthiest Nation: For science. For action. For health.

**April 1 - 7, 2019**

*Edition: Thursday, April 4, 2019*

# Technology and Public Health

## Did You Know?

The Southeast Health District uses the Georgia Department of Public Health's Telehealth Network to improve access to dental care.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), more than one quarter of children ages 2 to 5 and one-half of children ages 12 to 19 are affected by tooth decay. In Georgia, more than half of all third-grade students have dental issues and more than a quarter of these students have tooth decay that's untreated.

There are very few dental providers in rural, Southeast Georgia and even fewer who accept Medicaid. For more than a decade, the Southeast Health District (SEHD) has conducted school-based, teledentistry clinics to meet the oral health needs of children. Teledentistry is defined as the delivery of dental services utilizing videoconference technology. Dental hygienists are onsite with the patient while the dentists are located at a remote site. The technology transmits dental x-rays and pictures from the intraoral camera to the remote dentist. The Dental College of Georgia at Augusta University provides clinical oversight for school sessions. A local dentist offers program guidance and clinical support to the SEHD teledentistry program.

Teledentistry clinics are currently conducted in Brantley, Charlton and Clinch counties. The SEHD's dental hygienist and dental assistant schedule clinics in conjunction with school staff and work throughout the school year to address oral health needs. School-based dental clinics provide cleaning, fluoride, x-rays and education. Staff also make referrals to contracted dentists for restorative dental care and case manage children for follow-up. During the 2017-2018 school year, teledentistry staff saw 747 children on 80 clinic days. For 69 children, the teledentistry visit was their first dental visit. The goal is to continue this extremely important program and to expand to additional counties through a continued grant partnership with Augusta University and from billing revenue.

# Did you Know?

The Georgia Department of Public Health and a film crew with State Tech out of Washington, D.C. was on site filming in Valdosta, Georgia at South Health District Children's Medical Services' Telemedicine program. The department's telemedicine program links health departments and wellness clinics to specialty physicians throughout the state to increase access to training and services via a video conferencing platform. The Southeast Health District in Waycross, Georgia manages the operational aspects of the statewide network where Roger Bunch serves as IT Manager.



The Department of Public Health telehealth network is one of the most robust and comprehensive public health telemedicine networks in the nation and is touted through both ASTHO and the American Telemedicine Association as a successful model of care.  The Georgia Department of Health relies on $2.4 million in annual state funding dedicated to telehealth to maintain the program. The department utilizes a hub-and-spoke model for its network, and it installed dedicated circuits throughout the state to ensure that clinics had the bandwidth necessary to support telehealth solutions.

"Our patients come into the health department to visit their specialist, and do not have to drive 3-4 hours to see their specialty physicians," says Suleima Salgado, MBA, Director of Telehealth, telemedicine and rural health initiatives for the Georgia Department of Public Health.  "Our nurses act as the hands, eyes and ears for physicians on the other end of the screen."

IT Manager, Roger Bunch states "the District uses Cisco Systems videoconferencing equipment for all of our counties.  This provides consistency as well as technical support.  If a site experiences technical difficulty, my team troubleshoots the issue and knows just what to do."

**The American Public Health Association states:** New technologies are quickly transforming the public health landscape. For example, state environmental health tracking programs are using spatial analysis and visualization methods to help predict people's hazardous exposure risks. Organizers are building online learning communities where public health practitioners worldwide can swap best practices. National health officials use GIS mapping to track a range of serious health conditions — such as diabetes, heart disease and HIV — and use that information to deepen our understanding of the social determinants of health. In the nation's public health labs, workers use state-of-the-art technology to rapidly detect, trace and contain disease outbreaks. And in health departments across the country, workers have taken to social media to educate and advocate within their local communities.