



Silverton School nurse Becky Joyce talks with nurse Amanda Harrison at Pediatric Partners of the Southwest in Durango via a video connection on Tuesday morning, Feb. 7.

Mark Esper/Silverton Standard & the Miner

The Doctor Is In (Durango)

But pediatricians there and in Denver now examining kids at Silverton School via Internet

Thanks to the school's high-speed Internet connection — and a grant from an anonymous source — Silverton parents now have the option of seeing a pediatrician in Durango without leaving town.

The service is offered through Pediatric Partners of the Southwest, which can also provide tele-medicine services to specialists at Children's Hospital of Denver.

School nurse Becky Joyce said the service is available Mondays through Fridays during the school year, from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.

"You don't need to be an established patient (of Pediatric Partners) to see them for something minor like an ear infection," Joyce added.

Amanda Harrison, RN, and telemedicine coordinator for Pediatric Partners, said the Durango clinic has been practicing tele-medicine for a couple of years but a grant helped expand the scope of those services.

And with the school now wired with a high-speed fiber optic line, the necessary infrastructure was in place, once about \$8,000 worth of equipment was installed in the school.

"As with any technology, it

"So many times we don't know if we should take a child down to see a doctor. This is going to eliminate that second-guessing."

— Silverton School nurse Becky Joyce

improves continuously," Harrison said. "We went from a big box to a smaller unit that Becky (Joyce) has. The coolest part is the stethoscope and otoscope, so we can monitor patients remotely."

Joyce says the otoscope in her office at the school allows a doctor in Durango to examine the ear of a child in Silverton, with high resolution.

"It can magnify whatever we need to look at — inside the mouth, the nose, or a cut," Joyce said. "We can look at it really closely so the doctor can see it."

Joyce said the service could save parents some trips to the doctor in Durango.

Dr. Cecile Fraley, CEO of Pediatric Partners, "did the first test run a few weeks ago," Joyce said. "It took about 45 minutes. The kiddo was assessed and antibiotics were ordered. The mom went down (to Durango) the next day to get the prescription. The child didn't even miss

school."

Joyce pointed to the particular benefit of the system in Silverton's winter weather, with frequent pass closures and hazardous driving conditions.

"For a parent, it's typically a 6-hour trip" for a visit with a pediatrician in Durango, Joyce said.

Joyce credited school Superintendent Kim White for developing the school-based health center.

"She and I had been talking about a grant so that a simple rash didn't take kids out of school just because we didn't know if it was communicable," Joyce said.

And Joyce, who is also the San Juan County Public Health director, said she'd like to see the system expanded in Silverton so that adults could also enjoy the benefits of tele-medicine.

"We wish we could get this for adults and seniors," Joyce said. "This is paving the way for that."

Joyce advises Silverton parents to "call the school first" if they'd like to take advantage of the service.

It's open to any child in San Juan County.

"They don't have to be a student at the school or preschool," Joyce said.

And the system can also connect Silverton patients to specialists in Denver, including psychiatrists for basic evaluations.

Joyce's office at the school also is supplied with some basic medicines and strep tests, rapid flu tests, mononucleosis tests and RSV tests.

"We can do a lot of rapid tests here," Joyce said, "including all kinds of things for respiratory conditions. And we can always send them down (to Durango) for more care."

That, too, Joyce pointed out, is an advantage of tele-medicine in Silverton.

"So many times we don't know if we should take a child down to see a doctor," Joyce said. "This is going to eliminate that second-guessing."

And Joyce said that Pediatric Partners has been great in "working with people with no insurance or just bare-bones insurance."