The UTMB Telehealth Center uses new technology to bring the family doctor or specialist to patient in other areas. From his computer at the UTMB Department of Family Medicine, Dr. Thomas Pfeil can take care of patients in Alvin or other areas. He can do a complete physical exam with the help of a special medical camera and a nurse at the clinic with the patient. Imagine going to see the doctor and seeing him on the computer screen, from a distance of 35 miles or more.

**What is telemedicine?** Telemedicine delivers medical care at a distance. The patient doesn't have to be in the same room with the doctor for the doctor to diagnose and treat. The information is transferred by the Internet, telephone, fax, satellite, or a mix of these. The travel costs for the patients are reduced, since telemedicine brings the doctor to their community.

**How does a telemedicine visit work?** Each telemedicine visit involves a provider at a hub site (usually a hospital or health care center), and a nurse in the room with the patient at a remote site.

**During the visit, the provider:**

- Examines the patient with the nurse's assistance to collect information with equipment that transmits sound and pictures
- Makes treatment decisions and reviews them with the nurse and patient
- Sends prescriptions by fax or email to the nurse for the patient

**During the visit, the nurse:**

- Uses special medical equipment to examine the patient for the provider
- Sends exam information back to the provider
- sees that the patient knows where to get medicine, if they need it and understands the provider's instructions
- Schedules follow-up visits before the patient leaves the site
- Updates the patient's medical record

**The benefits of a telemedicine visit are:**

- The patients do not have to travel far to see their doctor
- You have a nurse to call if you have questions - just like at a regular doctor's office

What kind of equipment is involved? Each visit needs two specially equipped computers with video cameras, microphones. One computer is at the hub site (doctor's location) and the other one is at the clinic (the nurse's location). Patient survey's collected by the UTMB Telehealth Center show that most of the patients are very happy with the care they receive at the clinics and would tell their family and friends about telemedicine. Some of the equipment looks like the flight deck of the Star Ship Enterprise, but it is really just a way for the doctor to come to the patient. It is not exactly a house call, but it's pretty close.