





Medicine Across the Miles

Capital Health's Regional
Telehealth program uses technology
to bring health care closer to home

By Deepti Babu

Over the past 28 years, Sonja Schmidt has been a foster mother to lots of Northern Alberta children, many of whom have special needs. A resident of High Level, Schmidt currently cares for four kids who are patients of Capital Health's Home Nutrition Support, a program for tube-fed children. It used to be that Schmidt and her kids had to drive more than nine hours each way for medical appointments in Edmonton, trips that often required at least one night away from home. Now they can easily make their way to a telehealth appointment just two blocks from her house.

"I was skeptical about how it was going to work at first," says Schmidt of the telehealth program. "But in the end, I was quite impressed. I don't have to leave town, and everybody on the team is ready and works well together. My kids get a charge out of it. To them, it's a fun outing."

Two years ago, the nutrition support team offered Schmidt the possibility of appointments in her community, as part of Capital Health's Regional Telehealth program. She was keen to try. Now Schmidt takes her kids to the local hospital to meet with the Edmonton team via videoconference. At any particular appointment, Schmidt might see pediatric nurses, dietitians, feeding therapists and physicians for a full assessment, including a close-up look with the video camera to check her kids' feeding tube sites.

Dietitian Carol Graham-Parker, who works with the Home Nutrition Support program, says feedback from people like Schmidt about telehealth has been very encouraging. "The ease for parents is astronomical," Graham-Parker says. "Without telehealth appointments we might not see some families at all because it's so difficult for them to come in."

Capital Health's telepediatrics service and

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