

ASTHMA EDUCATION PROVIDED TO HALE COUNTY STUDENTS VIA TELEMEDICINE

By Brett Jaillet

The College of Community Health Sciences has launched a school-based asthma education program at Greensboro Elementary School in Hale County, Ala. The program, which is conducted via telemedicine, is the second of its kind to be offered by the College. The first was started in 2014 in DeKalb County, Ala.

The Hale County program is being led by Dr. Karen Burgess, associate professor and chair of the Department of Pediatrics, and Beth Smith, CRNP, a nurse practitioner in the Pediatrics Clinic at University Medical Center, which is operated by the College.

About 50 students are participating in the classes, which are offered weekly for the students and their parents to learn about asthma symptoms, medications and treatments. Each class meets four times for 45 minutes.

“Because the school has so many students with diagnosed asthma, we project providing the education through the end of the school year,” says Amelia de los Reyes, RN, MSN, technology coordinator for the College’s Telehealth Division.

The first classes were conducted via telemedicine in October 2015. Ten fourth-grade students and 11 fifth-grades students made up the classes.

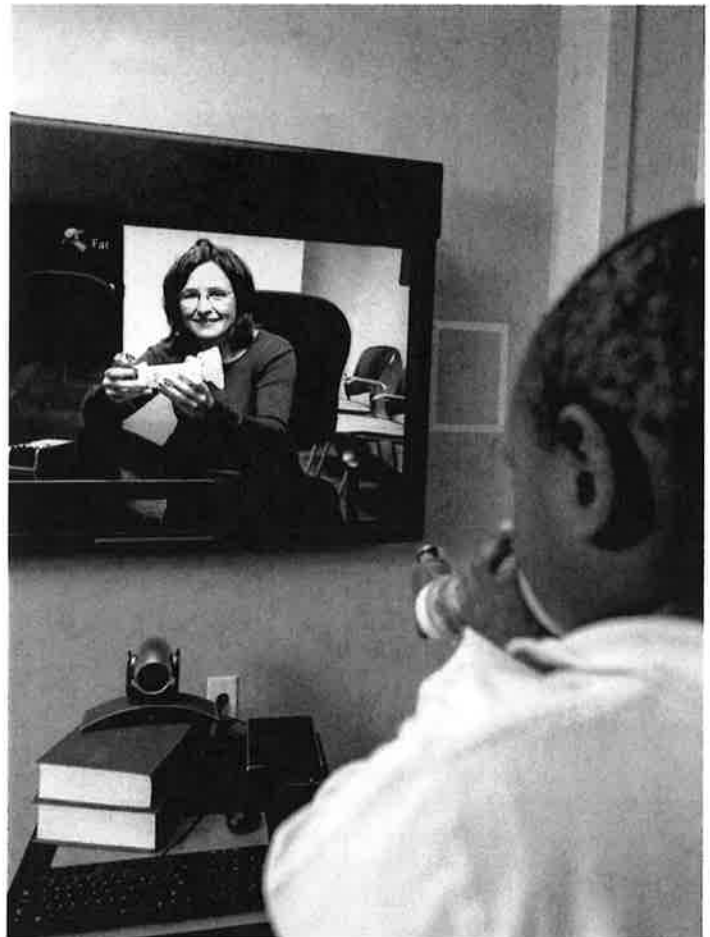
Before those first classes, the College educated teachers and support staff. Smith, via telemedicine, covered topics such as the signs and symptoms of asthma, the impact it can have on learning and how to control asthma and manage an attack.

The first school-based asthma education program was offered at Ruhama Junior High School in Fort Payne. The school was chosen because of its high rate of documented asthma cases, and Burgess and Smith referred to the National Asthma Prevention Program and the Alabama Department of Public Health’s asthma coalition when forming the curriculum.

The asthma education program is being funded with a \$25,000 gift from BlueCross BlueShield of Alabama.

According to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, an estimated 137,000 children in Alabama had asthma in 2007, a prevalence rate of 12.3 percent, which compares to the US rate of 9 percent.

Part of the gift was used to provide Ruhama Junior High School students with asthma spacers (add-on devices for inhalers that allow for easier and more effective administration of medication). Smith says the hope is that students at Greensboro Elementary School will also be provided with spacers if they do not have them.



Burgess says parents of the Ruhama Junior High School students reported improved symptoms of asthma in their children. She said she and Smith found the informal classroom setting (versus a medical examination room setting) to be helpful in engaging the students, even with the occasional “awkwardness” that comes with communicating with video conferencing equipment.

“We provide asthma education every day in the clinic and never have had kids ask questions the way they do in the classroom,” she says.

CCHS has provided specialty health care via telemedicine across the state for a number of years, including: telepsychiatry services to West Alabama Mental Health Center, with sites in Marengo, Choctaw, Greene, Hale and Sumter counties; and diabetes education via telemedicine to a number of rural Alabama communities in Sumter, Pickens and Clarke counties.