

The Miami Herald

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107TH YEAR, NO. 328 ©2010

MiamiHerald.com



SUNDAY, AUG. 8, 2010
FINAL EDITION

HEALTH & SAFETY

School clinics put health records online

■ South Florida school nurses are using electronic records to streamline student healthcare.

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Even school nurses are going digital.

Health professionals in a growing number of Miami-Dade County schools are using electronic records to document student health services.

Some schools are taking it a step further by making the records available to community health centers — with parental consent.

Deborah Montilla, director of student services for the Miami-Dade school district, said the push toward electronic records will benefit thousands of children, many of whom don't have access to other healthcare.

"It helps ensure that when we discover things at the school site, the child is getting the follow-up care they really need," Montilla said.

The initiative is part of a collaboration known as HealthConnect in Our Schools. Partners include the school district, The Children's Trust, the Miami-Dade County Health Department and a number of community health centers and hospitals.

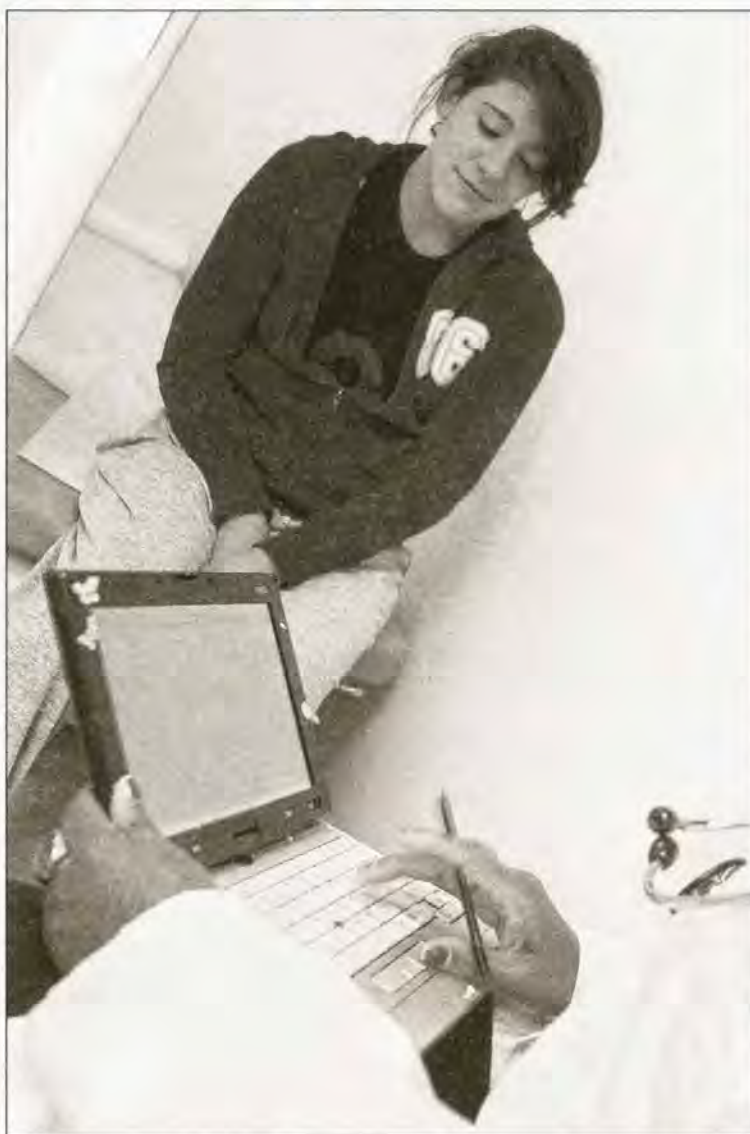
HealthConnect staffs 133 health suites in Miami-Dade schools with nurses, nurse practitioners, social workers and health aides.

More than 110,000 different children visit the suites annually, according to The Children's Trust.

This past school year, more than half of the health suites used electronic records, with the aid of technology from Sage Healthcare.

The technology isn't in place in the Broward County district yet, but administrators hope to have it soon.

The move toward electronic records follows a national trend. Last year, the Obama administration set aside more than \$19 bil-



lion in federal stimulus funds to help create a national system of electronic patient records. And nearly every major hospital in South Florida is on board.

Studies show that student health is directly related to how well they perform in school.

"We all know that as adults, we don't do well at work when we're not feeling well," Montilla said. "It's the same for students. They can't learn when they're not feeling well."

But school nurses are in short supply nationwide — and in even shorter supply in the Sunshine State. Florida has one

school nurse for every 2,518 students, according to the National Association of School Nurses. Compare that to Vermont, which has one nurse for every 311 schoolchildren.

Creating and maintaining records is a critical task for school health professionals, said Andrew Brickman, Executive Director of Childhood Health and Development for The Children's Trust.

Records enable doctors and nurses to know a child's medical history. They also help prevent the duplication of services, he said.



JONATHAN CAMERE

ROUTINE CHECK UPS: Nicole Sans, left, receives healthcare at Ferguson High as part of Miami-Dade's HealthConnect in Our Schools program. Michelle Paul, above, uses high-tech gear to check on Jonathan Alvarez.

What's more, records are useful when a the child goes outside of the school for a follow-up visit.

"Unfortunately, very often, a physician or another health professional who sees a child may not know the history or the current medications or the allergies a child has," Brickman said. "That information is germane to the care of that child."

Tim Tyler of Health Choice Network said the information technology company is working to bring the electronic records technology to more schools.

"Long term, the goal would be for every school with a clinic to have electronic records," he said.

Other initiatives are also in the works in Miami-Dade County.

This year, HealthConnect in our Schools hopes to start linking schools to local health-care providers through videoconferencing technology.

"Our target is to try to bring an additional 50 schools online using a telehealth model," Brickman said. "So instead of having a nurse traveling in a car and getting caught in horrendous traffic, we can have her on the other end

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of a video line."

Brickman is also working to give parents secure access to their children's school health records online.

He expects the so-called "health vaults" to be online within six months.

"It empowers parents to have the medical information they need about their children," he said.

Further down the road, Brickman hopes to link student health records with the records in local pediatrician's offices and hospitals.