

WHITE COAT NOTES

## Look into the camera, say 'Ah'

August 25, 2008

*Excerpts from the Globe's blog on the Boston-area medical community.*

Patients like face-to-face appointments with their doctors, but videoconference visits were almost as popular in a small trial in Boston. In a pilot study at Massachusetts General Hospital reported in the journal *Telemedicine and e-Health*, 30 patients who came to see their primary care physician for routine follow-up or acute care agreed to first have a visit via a computer equipped with a Web camera.

Their physician, Dr. Ronald F. Dixon, sat in another room to conduct the visit, asking questions while patients pointed to where it hurt, for example.

After patients and the doctor completed questionnaires about the virtual visit, they met face to face, with a hands-on physical examination. Not surprisingly, patients liked the face-to-face visit better, saying they preferred the doctor's manner in person.

But as far as how much time was spent, how well the doctor gave explanations, and how competent he appeared, both kinds of visits got the same marks. Twenty-six of 30 patients said they would recommend videoconference visits to friends as a way to save time.

Dixon, who wrote the journal article with Mass. General colleague Dr. James E. Stahl, said virtual visits like these could never replace care that requires physical examinations, but for some conditions, such as upper respiratory infections or back pain, videoconferencing may work just as well.

The pilot study was supported by the Center for the Integration of Medicine and Innovative Technology, a consortium of Boston-area hospitals and universities.

### **The quest to stop HIV**

**A new campaign to halt the spread of HIV has enlisted social marketing in Boston to reach people who have the disease - as well as those who don't.**

**Called "HIV Stops With Us," the effort pairs one person who is HIV-positive person with an HIV-negative friend, family member, care provider, or partner.**

**They tell their stories on a website launched last week that invites people to have an online conversation with these spokesmodels. It also offers links to more information, which for Boston means the state's HIV-AIDS Bureau.**

**The campaign, which includes advertising in newspapers and on subways and buses, is sponsored in Boston by the Justice Resource Institute and the Massachusetts Asians & Pacific Islanders for Health, with funding from the Boston Public Health Commission.**

**ELIZABETH COONEY ■**