



# A Global Epidemic:

## Screening the masses through Telemedicine

It was a shower of floaters in her right eye that made Antonia Reyes of Hatch to go to her doctor at the Ben Archer primary care clinic. She was then referred to the Health Department Clinic in Las Cruces for pictures of her retinas taken by the Clinic staff for the UNM Telemedicine Program. “We read those images at UNM, and immediately told the patient to come to the UNM Eye Clinic in Albuquerque. She was bleeding in her right eye from small blood vessels that were growing due to diabetes. She also had macular edema in her left eye from her leaky vessels,” remembers **Roy Sanchez, OD**, the optometrist who has been instrumental in leading the UNM Telemedicine program for screening of diabetic retinopathy patients over the last seven years.

Ms. Reyes was seen at UNM and treated with her first round of panretinal laser in her right eye and focal laser in the left eye later that month. After several visits and treatments, her vision stabilized. Her best corrected visual acuity is now 20/30 in right eye and 20/25 in left eye. “I would have been blind without those early pictures of the back of my eyes. I am grateful to my doctors,” comments Reyes as she enjoys her current vision.

Telemedicine screening of diabetic retinopathy is one of the missions of the UNMH Eye Clinic. The goal is to reach the community, especially areas where people have limited access to the specialized ophthalmic services, so that this devastating disease can be detected early and appropriate therapeutic interventions can be made through laser or surgery.

The Telemedicine Program is especially beneficial in a rural state like New Mexico with limited access to specialty care. This program also addresses the nearly half of patients with diabetes who do not receive annual eye care by providing screening where patients have their primary care exams. It also fosters communication between primary care doctors and eye care providers.



**Roy Sanchez, OD**  
Optometrist

“I find it very rewarding to know that we are making an impact in the lives of patients who might otherwise experience permanent sight loss. I see time and again how this program was able to detect sight threatening retinopathy in patients who may have otherwise not been detected. Eventually, I would like to see a teleretinal camera at all primary care clinic sites with a substantial diabetes population,” remarks Dr. Sanchez.



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