

SUNDAY

Times-Standard

Good morning!

April 30, 1995

142nd Year, No. 118

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\$1.50 Sundays
(Sales tax included)

Conferees mull future health care

CR hosts regional discussion

By Scott T. Smith
The Times-Standard

EUREKA — In the future, patients will have to worry less about their doctor's bedside manner than whether he or she is user friendly and has a graphical interface.

Medicine, like so many aspects of modern living, is rapidly becoming part of the Internet, an international computer network that in the last five years has exploded with a plethora of avenues, side streets and boardwalks on the "information highway."

College of the Redwoods hosted a daylong Internet Medical Conference on Saturday, which drew dozens of professionals from regional hospitals, clinics and public health offices to discuss the impact computers will have on medicine.

The Internet has made tremendous leaps in technology within the last five years, with the addition of user-friendly operating systems, or "graphical interfaces," that function much the same way as a Ma-

cintosh computer or an IBM "Windows" program.

Larry Goldberg, president of the North Coast Internet, said the trend is toward saving time and money by using more resources for modern medical care.

He made the comments during a panel discussion at the end of the conference.

Technicians at local clinics may soon become intermediaries for regional doctors, taking information such as a patient's blood sugar level, pulse rate, blood pressure and transmitting it over the Internet to the doctor who could be 200 miles or 20,000 miles away. CAT-scans, X-rays and other diagnostic tools will be transmitted over the network in a matter of seconds.

Patients may even have the option of talking to the doctor face to face using video screens.

Jack Higgins, a family practitioner in Chico and a panel speaker, said such modernizations will prove to be a boon to rural areas where officials have trouble keeping qualified medical personnel in residence. It will also lower the number of doctors needed because one will be able to easily serve more patients.

Also, Higgins said a system of computer house calls could save money and time.