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From Auburn to Afghanistan: A heartbeat heard round the world

Couple originally from Auburn take part in ultrasound while husband is in Afghanistan

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Ashley Elder, left, and husband, Mylin Elder, on screen, talk and look at their unborn daughter during an ultrasound Friday at Multicare Women's Center in Auburn. Mylin currently is deployed in Kandahar, Afghanistan. Dr. Roque Lanza, right, and advance registered nurse practitioner Malinda Carlile, holding camera, assist.

PETER HALEY — Staff photographer [Buy Photo](#)

As the medical staff gathered to watch the pregnant woman's ultrasound, they were less focused on the baby's image than on the father grinning from a screen as he saw his daughter's face for the first time from his room in Afghanistan.

All agreed that this was the most exciting thing to happen at the MultiCare Women's Center in Auburn for a long time.

“I’ve got goosebumps,” said Marie Blumenthal, a medical assistant.

Army Spc. Mylin Elder, 26, was part of a unique video conference from his base in Afghanistan to watch the ultrasound via a technology that allows for virtual obstetrical visits. His wife, Ashley, is due in January with the couple’s second daughter, whom they’ve already named Harper.

The soldier watched intently as Dr. Roque Lanza showed him Harper’s face and hands and let him listen to her heartbeat.

Elder left for his first deployment in July, shortly after the couple found out they were expecting their second child.

“It’s hard to go through a pregnancy by yourself,” said Ashley Elder, 25. “This makes it feel like a family event.”

She grew up in Graham and is living in Auburn during her husband’s deployment so she can have the support of both extended families.

The technology that was used Friday, called Scopia, is a medical version of Skype that allows pregnant women to receive checkups from almost anywhere.

Advanced registered nurse practitioner Malinda Carlile said she gives patients a cuff to measure their blood pressure remotely and a portable machine to hear the fetal heartbeat. Patients can log on from wherever they have an Internet connection, and Carlile can take vital signs and talk with the mother.

On Friday, Ashley Elder took the more traditional route and was visiting Lanza in person for a 31-week visit.

Carlile said she has used Scopia previously to let deployed soldiers peek in on visits and hear their children’s heartbeat, but this is the first time staff was able to include an ultrasound.

“It’s been amazing being able to see my daughter,” Mylin Elder said afterward. “I can’t wait to come home and see her.”

If all goes as planned, he will have a two-week break from his overseas duty for Harper’s birth.

Ashley Elder said she hopes the virtual visit will help her husband feel more connected to her pregnancy; she said she would definitely recommend the experience to other wives whose husbands are deployed.

The couple and their other child, 3-year-old Keira, are currently stationed at Fort Carson, Colo. Both have family and roots in the South Sound. Ashley Elder graduated from West Auburn High School in 2006, and Mylin Elder graduated from Auburn High School in 2005.

The couple have been married four years, and Mylin Elder has been in the military for a little more than three years.

Ashley said that if the couple have another child, and her husband is deployed again, she hopes to start with virtual visits earlier so that he can be even more involved.

Carlile said she and Lanza hope to develop the virtual visits and ultrasound sharing into a more widely used program for soldiers and their families to access at other Multicare Health System facilities.

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