

Organization Launches Health Records Project

Massachusetts eHealth Collaborative is a not-for-profit group founded by 34 health care institutions.

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BOSTON — Three Massachusetts communities will soon be wired for electronic health record systems as part of a \$50 million pilot project.

The idea, being undertaken by the Massachusetts eHealth Collaborative, is to test out the implementation of interoperable EHRs within communities before attempting to connect physicians across the entire state.

"We're completely focused on practical solutions so we can get these things into physicians' hands and health care professionals' hands and keep them there," Micky Tripathi, CEO of the Massachusetts eHealth Collaborative said at a congress sponsored by the American Medical Informatics Association.

The collaborative is a not-for-profit group founded by 34 health care institu-

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tions seeking to create a statewide health information network.

The collaborative was launched last fall and requested applications for its pilot project last December. They received 35 applications from commu-

nities across the state and chose three—greater Brockton, greater Newburyport, and Northern Berkshire.

The pilot is being funded through a grant from Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts. Each community chosen was a relatively self-contained medical referral market, had strong local health care professional leadership, and demonstrated an openness to information technology innovation, Mr. Tripathi said.

The final selections were based in part on location, patient diversity, and information technology maturity, he said.

Members of the collaborative also wanted to choose communities at different points of the information technology adoption curve in order to see the different types of benefits.

The three communities cover nearly 600 physicians treating roughly 500,000 patients. Overall, there are 182 primary care physicians and 410 specialists. The pilots will include almost 200 offices sites, most of which have one to five physicians, Mr. Tripathi said.

The pilot projects will include the purchase and installation of EHRs at all clinical care points, as well as connecting them to other systems within the community. Although existing studies have shown the benefit of EHRs on a small scale, Mr. Tripathi said this pilot is a chance

to see what will happen in a larger, community-wide rollout.

The pilot will be aimed at determining the barriers to adoption, identifying the costs—both direct and indirect—of adoption, and analyzing the benefits.

Officials at the collaborative will also be

seeking to figure out how the costs and benefits are distributed across stakeholders. Finally, they will be looking for the best ways to provide incentives and how that could be replicated going forward.

"This transition can't be done to physicians," he said. "It's got to be an idea that we sell to them."

The collaborative plans to select EHR vendors by the end of May and be under contract by the end of the summer. The pilot timeline calls for implementing sys-

tems in a clinical care setting before the end of the year. At the beginning of 2006, the collaborative expects to implement interoperability capabilities for the systems. The pilot projects are slated to end in mid-2008.

In addition, the collaborative plans to work with the other 32 communities that were not selected for the pilot to help them implement EHR systems by sharing the infrastructure, expertise, and arrangements created through the pilots. ■

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