

Maine beefs up health information exchange

By John Moore

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Backers of a Maine health information exchange said more than 2,000 healthcare providers will soon participate in a demonstration of the project.

The exchange, HealthInfoNet, is a nonprofit organization funded by foundations and providers as well as the state of Maine and the federal government. HealthInfoNet's technology vendors, 3M Health Information Systems and Orion Health, will build and operate the HIE. Meanwhile, DrFirst, a Rockville, Md., company that sells an e-prescribing management systems called Rcopia, will coordinate e-prescribing services.

According to HealthInfoNet, the 2,000-plus providers will begin to access the exchange's clinical data repository this summer. That number includes almost half of the rural and urban hospitals in Maine and a third of the state's physicians, the organization said.

Dr. David Howes, who chairs HealthInfoNet's board, called the network the largest statewide HIE using clinical information, adding that only Delaware and Vermont operate similar exchanges.

Most of the organizations taking part in the HIE's demonstration phase are hospitals. Those include Maine's four largest health delivery systems: Central Maine Health Care, Eastern Maine Healthcare Systems, MaineGeneral Medical Centers and MaineHealth. Martin's Point Health Care, a primary care practice, is also participating.

Devore Culver, executive director of HealthInfoNet, said the organization wanted to tap into a high volume of content during the demonstration phase without expending a significant amount of money. For that reason, HealthInfoNet pursued larger entities and, as a result, "the data is heavily hospital based," he said.

But Culver added that the data includes two statewide reference labs and a test case for ambulatory care.

Dr. Barry Blumenfeld, chief information officer for MaineHealth and Maine Medical Center, said it made sense to "go for the most bang for the buck," in working with hospitals. That said, "it doesn't change the fact that ... at some point down the road it will be very important to connect to all of those private practices," he added.

HealthInfoNet's demonstration phase began in early 2008 and is slated for completion in mid 2010.