

# Maine hosts nation's health IT chief as it goes live with HIE

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David Blumenthal, MD

PORTLAND, ME – President Obama's healthcare IT chief David Blumenthal, MD, was on hand Friday as Maine announced it will go live this summer with the country's largest statewide health information exchange.

Leaders of the project, which has been five years in the making, say the launch of the exchange represents a major step toward transforming how care will be delivered to the state's 1.3 million residents.

Maine's HealthInfoNet network will be the largest statewide electronic health information exchange (HIE) using clinical data, they say. Only Delaware and Vermont have similar statewide exchanges in operation.

The announcement coincided with a visit by Blumenthal, who was the keynote speaker Friday at the statewide Hanley Leadership Forum in Portland. After his talk, Blumenthal visited Maine Medical Center's emergency department to see first hand how medical teams would use the new system.

HealthInfoNet will make it possible for caregivers to gain quick and efficient access to key clinical information they need to provide the best possible care for their patients. Health information technology is a major element of the nation's emerging health reform strategy.

Electronic exchanges such as HealthInfoNet are viewed as critical to connecting the rapidly growing number of providers using electronic medical records and other systems. Industry experts say HIEs will reduce medical errors and lead to better, more informed treatment decisions. As HealthInfoNet expands services across the state, an estimated \$50 million per year in healthcare costs is expected to be saved as caregivers order fewer unnecessary and duplicative tests, procedures, prescriptions and hospital admissions.

Despite a substantial budget shortfall, the State of Maine has included \$1.7 million in its 2010-2011 budget to allow HealthInfoNet to go live this summer and to position Maine for federal matching funds that are expected to be available later this year under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. Some \$8 million has been raised so far to build HealthInfoNet. Another \$12 million is needed to build out the statewide infrastructure. It's estimated that it will cost approximately \$6 million to operate HealthInfoNet on an annual basis.

Beginning this summer, more than 2,000 healthcare providers – including nearly half of the rural and urban hospitals across Maine and one-third of practicing physicians in Maine – will have access for the first time to HealthInfoNet's secure clinical data repository. Use of the system will be phased in over the next several months.

## Now in demo mode

Hospitals and physician practices taking part in HealthInfoNet's current demonstration phase (which began in early 2008) account for more than half of the state's annual inpatient hospital admissions, 50 percent of the annual emergency department visits, and nearly 40 percent of Maine's outpatient visits each year. Following the successful completion of the demonstration phase in mid-2010, plans call for HealthInfoNet to be expanded over time to include other providers who care for Maine's entire population.

"The efforts of HealthInfoNet to advance electronic information-sharing to improve Maine's healthcare are extremely important to protect the state's public health," said Dora Anne Mills, MD, of Maine CDC, who pointed out that the federal government has called for the nation to implement more effective real-time public health event monitoring and rapid response in order to ensure that the population is protected from emerging public health threats. "HealthInfoNet is advancing this directive here in Maine," she said.

Mills said automated electronic reporting of public health threats has been shown nationally to improve the completeness and timeliness of reporting to public health authorities, compared to manual processes, allowing diseases to be detected and responded to earlier. The partnership between Maine CDC and HealthInfoNet will automate reporting from healthcare to public health, shortening the time required to respond to and protect the public from health threats.

HealthInfoNet has retained 3M Health Information Systems and Orion Health to build and operate Maine's statewide health information exchange. DrFirst, Inc. has been retained to provide coordination in automating electronic prescribing services and access to medication history information to medical care teams.

Organized as a public-private partnership, HealthInfoNet has received funding support from a wide range of private foundations, provider organizations and state and federal government agencies.

Public opinion research completed in late 2006 found that many Maine people are concerned about the prospect of medical errors and believe that better coordination and communication among their providers is needed to improve healthcare quality and safety. Individuals in Maine and across the nation say they want more access to their own medical records so that they can verify the accuracy of information in the records and become more engaged in their own care. A Consumer Advisory Committee is assisting HealthInfoNet in the establishment of privacy and security policies designed to insure that systems are in place to protect the privacy of individuals' medical information.