

Maine Demonstrates Statewide HIE

HDM Breaking News, July 31, 2009

Maine's statewide health information exchange has gone live with a one-year demonstration program that will involve 15 hospitals and more than 2,000 clinicians. That includes more than one-third of practicing physicians in the state.

The demonstration follows more than three years of preparation, including developing, implementing and testing the data exchange platform during the past year. Information technology vendors for the project are Orion Health, Santa Monica, Calif.; 3M Health Information Systems, Salt Lake City; and DrFirst Inc., Rockville, Md.

Hospitals initially are supplying most of the data to be exchanged in the HIE, called HealthInfoNet. Data available in a standards-based Continuity of Care Record includes demographics; conditions, diagnoses or problems; allergies; prescription medications; laboratory results; and dictated/transcribed documents including diagnostic imaging reports. Data also is coming from pharmacy benefit management firms and two reference laboratories.

Some 70% of physicians in Maine are employed by hospitals. Along with hundreds of these doctors, four primary care physicians working at Martin's Point Health Care, a 34-member independent group practice, also are participating in the demonstration.

HIE proponents in Maine to date have raised about \$8 million to build HealthInfoNet. Funds include \$1.7 million awarded recently by the state government, which enabled the project to go live this summer. The funds also position the HIE to apply for matching federal funds under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. Other funds include \$3 million from a foundation, \$1.2 million from participating hospitals and \$600,000 from the Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention.

Private payers in the state, however, have contributed a total of \$50,000 so far, and they are not participating in the demonstration program.

The demonstration program is critical to the long-term viability of HealthInfoNet, says Devore Culver, executive director. That's because another \$12 million will be needed to expand the network statewide and \$6 million to operate it annually.

ARRA's Medicare/Medicaid incentives will encourage providers to join an HIE, which is an important driver of short-term viability, Culver notes. "But long-term, we need to show the benefits," he adds. "We will start to quantify benefits to providers, payers and citizens with the demonstration program to set the base of value."

David Blumenthal, M.D., the national coordinator for health information technology, traveled to Maine on July 31 to help launch the HIE. While ARRA includes \$300 million in funds for HIEs, Blumenthal acknowledged federal officials still have not figured out how that money will be spent, says David Howes, M.D., chair of HealthInfoNet and CEO of Martin's Point Health Care. "We'd love them to make up their minds about that because our bank account is not as fat as we'd like it to be."

More information is available at hinfonet.org.

—Joseph Goedert