

## Statewide system unveiled for sharing medical information

**AP** Associated Press

January 16, 2008

MANCHESTER, Maine --Health care providers Wednesday unveiled a statewide electronic system for sharing medical information, a network intended to improve the quality of care, reduce medical errors and slow the growth of health care costs.

Doctors and hospital and public health officials announced that \$4 million has been raised to begin construction of the nonprofit HealthInfoNet network, which is slated to be launched later this year.

The network was designed to give caregivers quick access to key clinical information, which can reduce medical errors and result in better treatment decisions.

Experts said much of the patient-specific clinical information in Maine is on paper, making it cumbersome to access and difficult to share. The new "electronic health record" offered through HealthInfoNet will contain information drawn from separately maintained records in doctors' offices, hospitals, laboratories and other locations.

Advocates of the system estimate that it should save \$50 million per year by curbing unnecessary and duplicative tests, procedures, prescriptions and hospital admissions.

A two-year pilot demonstration involving more than 2,000 health care providers, including 15 hospitals and one-third of the state's practicing doctors, will begin this winter. HealthInfoNet would be expanded to include other providers after the pilot project is completed.

Those taking part in the pilot include the corporate parents of the state's largest hospitals: Maine Medical Center in Portland, Eastern Maine Medical Center in Bangor, Central Maine Medical Center in Lewiston and MaineGeneral Medical Centers in Augusta and Waterville.

"Connecting our patients to a statewide network to share clinical information is particularly important considering the rural environment of Maine," said Scott Bullock, president and CEO of MaineGeneral Health.

"Many miles may separate a patient's various providers, and all need access to the most comprehensive and timely information at all times to provide the highest quality care," he said.

Those involved in the project said it will put Maine among the first states to build and operate a statewide electronic health information network.

Wednesday's announcement comes one week after officials in Bangor announced a \$24.7 million federal grant to develop a regional broadband network that will give northern New England health care providers quick and convenient access to the latest medical information.

The New England Telehealth Consortium network was billed as a way to speed the sharing of medical records and provide access for remote medical diagnostics and surgery, dentistry and behavioral health treatment. ■