

# HealthInfoNet CONNECTIONS

## MITCHELL URGES FURTHER HEALTH IT DEVELOPMENT



In a pair of speaking engagements before statewide audiences this fall, former U.S. Senator George Mitchell urged Maine to aggressively pursue the adoption of health IT networks.

"Networks such as HealthInfoNet hold tremendous promise for improving care and controlling costs," Mitchell told the Maine Hospital Association Fall Policy Forum in Freeport. The previous week Mitchell delivered a similar message at the Daniel Hanley Center for Health Leadership meeting in Brunswick.

Mitchell praised physicians, hospital leaders and others for their work in positioning Maine to become one of the first states in the nation to develop a statewide integrated clinical information-sharing system. Mitchell was a key figure in the establishment of the federal Agency for Health Research and Quality (AHRQ) in the late 1980s. Today, AHRQ is a major funder of health IT development in Maine and across the nation. HealthInfoNet staff met earlier this fall in Washington with AHRQ officials, as well as Maine's Congressional Delegation, to enlist support for additional funding.

## CONSUMER FOCUS GROUPS FIND SUPPORT FOR GREATER INFORMATION-SHARING

Consumers who took part in eight focus groups across Maine in October voiced support for the development of systems aimed at giving physicians and other care-givers the information they need to make more informed treatment decisions. At the same time, consumers expressed strong concern that rigorous privacy and security protections must be a high priority as Maine's provider community transitions from a largely paper-based medical record system to electronic systems.

More than 75 consumers participated in focus groups in Bangor, Presque Isle, Lewiston and Portland. HealthInfoNet organized the focus groups through its involvement in a federally-funded Privacy & Security research project. In these meetings, consumers emphasized the value they place on improved coordination and communication among their healthcare providers. A report describing the findings of these focus groups will be presented this month to the HealthInfoNet Board of Directors, which serves as the steering committee for the Privacy and Security project. Earlier this year, several dozen healthcare providers and attorneys gathered for a series of meetings designed to better understand privacy and security issues surrounding the exchange of clinical information-sharing.

## HEALTHINFONET FOCUSES ON SUSTAINABILITY

An intensive process is now under way to determine how the HealthInfoNet system will be funded. A special work group has met three times in recent months to develop a set of business principles and a business plan for the statewide network.

One of the network's first services may be a comprehensive patient-level medication history profile that will help clinicians make more informed patient care decisions. Hospital medical directors also have told HealthInfoNet that this service will help address one of every hospital's biggest challenges: quickly and efficiently reconciling patient medications. Because medication information from sources outside the hospital is not immediately available, physicians often have little confidence that they have all the information they need to make informed decisions and to accurately report a patient's full medication history. An early goal of HealthInfoNet will be to work closely with pharmacies, pharmacy benefit management companies and others to make this information available to you. HealthInfoNet also expects to achieve substantial savings by helping hospitals efficiently deliver comprehensive lab and diagnostic test results (including information from sources *outside* existing information-sharing networks) to physician practices through a convenient, user-friendly tool that clinicians can use to make faster and more fully-informed patient care decisions. On a parallel path, HealthInfoNet kicked off a comprehensive fundraising campaign this fall to secure funds needed to begin first-stage implementation of the statewide network in 2007. HealthInfoNet is soliciting additional financial support from employers, payers, providers as well as private foundations and state and federal government agencies. Members of the organization's Business Planning Work Group include Dr. David Howes, Chair, (Martin's Point Healthcare); Dan Coffey (Eastern Maine Healthcare); Dick Marston (Fraser Paper); John Witherspoon (Finance Authority of Maine); Karl Turner (businessman); Art Blank (Mt. Desert Island Hospital); and Bill Caron (MaineHealth).

## MASSACHUSETTS DECISION NOT EXPECTED TO AFFECT MAINE PLANS

Massachusetts' recent decision to place the development of its statewide health information "on hold" is not expected to affect Maine's HealthInfoNet system.

The organization developing the Bay State's system announced last month that it has decided to re-focus its efforts, at least in the near-term, to helping develop local and regional networks within Massachusetts. Like most states that are developing statewide networks, Massachusetts has yet to determine a viable long term sustainability plan for a statewide health information exchange. It is understood, however, that at some point Massachusetts will need to develop a statewide network to connect its emerging local and regional networks. "It's important to understand some key differences that exist between our two states," HealthInfoNet Executive Director **Dev Culver** explained. "These differences are significant and I continue to believe Maine is better positioned than Massachusetts at this time to develop a sustainability model in the near term." Among other things, Culver said, Massachusetts has a significantly larger and more complex health delivery infrastructure to bring together than is the case in Maine. Massachusetts also has placed a higher priority on the development of local network. For example, Blue Cross of Massachusetts has contributed \$50 million to build pilot physician practice information exchange networks in three communities within the state. This pilot project also is unaffected by the decision to temporarily suspend statewide network-building.

## TECHNICAL PLANNING INTENSIFIES

HealthInfoNet's expanded Technology and Professional Practice Advisory Committee met this month to review plans to engage a national technology vendor this winter and launch the statewide network's first stage implementation in 2007.

Earlier this year, the Committee concluded an extensive national RFP process that resulted in the selection of two technology vendor finalists—3M-Orion and Health-Vision. HealthInfoNet staff have been meeting with the vendor finalists over the past several months to refine their proposals and focus on a wide range of technical issues relating to assembling patient-level medication histories and other anticipated service offerings. Staff also have met with stakeholders in Maine, pharmacy representatives, PBM's and others to explore how the network might accelerate e-prescribing.



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