

## Franklin Memorial part of on-line information system pilot program

By Mike Peterson  
Editor

Farmington – Franklin Memorial Hospital is part of a high-tech pilot program that will likely prove a major advance in the quality of medical service.

The HealthInfoNet system was unveiled in an on-line conference call Wednesday that introduced the media to an on-line information system linking 15 rural and urban hospitals in Maine. After a few months of shakedown, the system will be expanded to cover the entire state, the first such system in the country.

HealthInfoNet collects patient information from participating health care providers in a secure setting so that a provider can see a patient's recent history in an organized, complete format.

In addition to assuring the provider of the basic information needed, the system will also make it easier for professionals to consult with each other to obtain a more complete picture of the patient's requirements.

The system will collect patient information not just from physicians' offices but from laboratories and other providers, information that is often not available without a good deal of time and effort. In particular, the system will benefit under-insured and uninsured patients who may obtain medical treatment on a catch-as-catch-can basis from a variety of sources.

According to Dr. David Howes, president of Martin's Point Health Care, the HealthInfoNet system will help avoid duplication in tests and problems with conflicting or interacting prescription drugs, as well as unifying care for patients.

Privacy was a major concern in creating the system, Howes said, but the security level is high and there are no reasonable fears of patient information being obtained by unauthorized parties.

In addition, patients will have the opportunity to limit or forbid access to their information on the system.

Eventually, the system will allow patients to log on and see who has accessed their information and what specific information was accessed, as well as to update or correct information in their files.

That patient access could also prove helpful if a patient has a medical emergency outside of Maine. Although HealthInfoNet will be available only to health care providers in the state of

Maine, a patient could log in from a distant point, allowing a physician there to have similar information without having to send for records from Maine.

Franklin Memorial Hospital was invited to participate in the development of the HealthInfoNet system because of its leadership in medical information technology, according to Ralph Johnson, the hospital's chief information officer.

Franklin Memorial already has a strong information system uniting its various providers and is about to upgrade its advanced Meditech system.

It has also pioneered a e-prescription system that coordinates patient prescriptions to avoid conflicts and interactions, Johnson said.

Rick Batt, president of Franklin Memorial, said the e-prescription system was winning praise from prescribers, who said they were getting alerts when writing prescriptions with a frequency that surprised , and pleased them.

"I'm not going to say it has saved lives," he said, "but we've heard from people who said they hadn't realized there was a problem between two drugs. There's just so much information to keep up with today!"

The hospital has also received federal funding to create a high-speed fibre-optic network uniting its various facilities in Western Maine, Batt and Johnson said, that will, as a bonus, provide high-speed access to many in the region who would not otherwise get it.

Batt explained that, instead of building and maintaining the fibre-optic system themselves, the hospital will be offering the system to a private operator, funding the construction in exchange for permanent access, and allowing the provider, in exchange for maintenance, to market the excess capacity to consumers and businesses throughout the region.

The resulting competition in high-speed access should benefit consumers, Batt said, particularly in areas that would not have received high-speed systems at such an early date, given the distances to be covered in lightly populated rural Maine.