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I-70 Hospital Positions for Electronic Health Record (EHR) Implementation HCC of Rural Missouri Provides Equipment to Help Hospital Make the Transition

(April 10, 2012) Sweet Springs, MO – Many hospitals like I-70 Community Hospital are making moves to eventually go paperless. Federal guidelines now mandate that Medicare eligible providers meet what is called “meaningful use” standards designed to improve efficiencies and patient outcomes. The move comes as a mandate by the Obama Administration’s American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009. Through the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services, the Medicare and Medicaid EHR Incentive Programs will provide incentive payments to eligible providers, hospitals, and critical access hospitals (CAHs) as they adopt, implement, or upgrade certified EHR technology. By 2017, most—if not all practitioners—are expected to use EHR technology. Those who do not will be penalized.

Making the transition

There are three stages of meaningful use. Stage one meaningful use requires providers to demonstrate use of electronic health record (EHR) technology in a way that can be measured significantly in quality and quantity. This includes certified use of an EHR (an electronic version of a patient’s medical history maintained by the provider) in a “meaningful” way such as sending a prescription to a pharmacist electronically, also referred to as e-prescribing.

I-70 Community Hospital is positioning to make the transition. Among the first step is identifying an EHR vendor to review the facility and make recommendations on EHR technology that integrates with the hospital’s network infrastructure. This infrastructure is already quite advanced. Wired for telehealth that enables patients to remotely visit with physicians, specialists and mental health care providers, I-70 has already outpaced city hospitals.

With support from the Health Care Collaborative (HCC) of Rural Missouri, I-70 has purchased Ethernet switches, 10 monitors and five “thin clients” which is a network computer without a hard disk drive that rolls out other virtual computers. Thin clients have all of the features typically found on a desktop PC and is increasingly an alternative to desktop computing. “We have some really neat technology here,” said James Noble, the hospital’s director of information technology and telemedicine. “We are ready for EMR technology.” With a superfast network of 1000 gigabytes per second, the facility already has the infrastructure to send data anywhere in the building quickly—which is the perfect EHR environment. To put this into proper context, most facilities only operate 100 gigabyte networks.

Why EHR technology is crucial

If you’ve ever tried to transfer your medical records from one provider to another, the process can be tedious. EHRs enable these records to be shared seamlessly between patient and provider. Noble also named these benefits:

- **Enhances patient safety with efficient record keeping.** “Clerical errors are the most common forms of errors,” Noble said. “The less information is written, the less chance an error will occur.”
- **Monitors disease management.** Allows a physician to see graphs and other visuals that depict how the patient’s disease has either progressed, stagnated or improved.
- **Takes the guess work out of physicians’ handwriting.** “Too often there is ‘guess work’ involved in trying to figure out what medications or tests a physician has prescribed for a patient,” Noble said. The EHR enables the physician to electronically input tests, medications and other patient records which eliminate mistakes.
- **Coordinates patient care.** Allows hospitals, ambulatory services, clinics and other providers to coordinate care because everyone has access to the same information. Among many other things, it also allows providers to spot drug seekers who visit a variety of hospitals for the same narcotic. “This runs up the cost of health care,” Noble said. “You spend a lot of resources and time triaging these individuals in the ER

when it would be nice to spend that time on people who are going to actually benefit from the health care services they receive.”

- **System interoperability.** A physician can be in the ER in Sweet Springs and see a patient in Concordia or Alma and have instant access to the patient’s records.
- **Caregiver access to the patient’s records.** Approved family members and caregivers have access to a patient’s records to help advocate on behalf of the patient as well as make informed medical decisions.
- **Access to knowledge sources.** Patients can participate in web groups, like a diabetic discussion group, to share resources, take classes, provide peer support among other activities (or view a recorded session at a later time). Patients can also access a variety of health educational tools and other resources from home.
- **Patient care plans and protocols.** This information is spelled out in black and white for the patient and enables the provider to know what plan, protocols and other health maintenance initiatives the patient’s doctor has ordered.

“This is all securely maintained with password protection and encryption,” Noble said. “Patients will appreciate the security EHRs provide.”

Another note of appreciation is the Health Care Collaborative (HCC) of Rural Missouri’s support in helping I-70 begin the process of meeting meaningful use requirements, Noble said. “They are serving a fantastic role in creating opportunities for hospitals to implement or enhance telemedicine services,” he said. “With HCC stepping in the middle, hospitals are able to let their guard down and collaborate. We know that HCC isn’t in this for one provider over another. They are in it for improved health care services for the entire region.”

So far HCC, a Lexington, MO-based rural health care network, has provided I-70 with \$27,200 to support EHR infrastructure—with even more dollars to be distributed. The funds are a part of a \$900,000 health information technology grant the HCC received through the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. HCC will delegate the majority of these dollars to its health information technology partners for equipment purchases to support EHR adoption.

“With the rapid changes in technology, it is important for rural providers to stay on top of the changes,” said Julie Coram, HCC’s Health Information Technology Manager. “Using grant funds, we are helping providers offset the financial obligations that these changes require.”

I-70 is one of HCC’s eight health information technology partners. The others include Lafayette Regional Health Center, Pathways Community Health, Fitzgibbon Hospital, Samuel U. Rodgers Health Center Lafayette Family Medicine - Dental & WIC Services, Richmond Family Clinic, and Carroll County Memorial Hospital.

For more information, contact Executive Director Toniann Richard or Julie Coram at 660.259.2440. Follow HCC on Facebook and Twitter.

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About Health Care Collaborative of Rural Missouri

The Health Care Collaborative of Rural Missouri (formerly the Health Care Coalition of Lafayette County) partners with area agencies, businesses and other non-profits to advocate for the health and well being of rural Missourians. Among HCC’s current programs are:

- Health information technology initiatives to equip health care providers with the resources needed to offer telemedicine and telehealth services that increase patient access to quality health care;
- Social Innovation for Missouri (SIM) that addresses tobacco cessation and obesity prevention; among other programs; and
- Rural Missouri Health Co-op—with a workplace wellness component—aimed at creating a healthier workforce and reducing insurance premiums.

