Electronic Health Record Integration a Win-Win for Fitzgibbon, Patients

HCC of Rural Missouri Provides Equipment to Help Hospital Meet Government Mandate

(April 23, 2012) Marshall, MO – Ready or not, the health care landscape is changing. Federal guidelines now mandate that hospitals, like Fitzgibbon Hospital in Marshall, MO, meet standards known as "Meaningful Use," which apply to patient medical records. "Meaningful Use" requires specific "meaningful" functionalities of an electronic medical record. These focus on health status measures that can be reported an analyzed via certified and secure computer software. Improved quality and more efficient care is the ultimate goal of meaningful use.

Fitzgibbon is among the many eligible providers around the nation working to meet those standards mandated by the Obama Administration's American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009. Through the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services, Electronic Health Record (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 practitioners—if not all —are expected to use EHR technology. Those who do not will be financially penalized.

Simplifying meaningful use mandates

There are three stages of meaningful use. Stage One meaningful use requires providers to demonstrate use of 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, which is known as "e-prescribing."

Another example is the use of certified EHR technology for exchanging health information electronically to improve patient outcomes. 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 the patient and provider without the copying of paper records. Other benefits include:

- Increased information transfer from one provider to the next
- Reduced medical error through improved accuracy and clarity of medical records
- Reduced duplication of tests and less delay in patient treatment
- Increased patient control of health care decisions as a result of having access to health records

Meeting meaningful use

As for Fitzgibbon, they are working to become paperless. They already have rolled out a variety of management software that touches nearly every department - from billing to emergency - to create more efficiency. For instance, staff working in the emergency department can take advantage of an automated system for patient registration, patient tracking, documentation and triage, quick order entry, prescriptions and medication management, among other things.

Additionally, Fitzgibbon is implementing computerized provider order entry (CPOE) compliance to a level of 30% by the end of the year. This means physicians, not nurses, must enter orders and other instructions electronically - without the use of paper. To meet this requirement, the hospital has purchased a CPOE software platform, voice recognition software and other related technology.

Over the next few months, the hospital also will scan and archive patient records. All of these initiatives will transition the hospital and its clinics to paperless systems.

When asked what providers— especially those in the early stages of meaningful use implementation—can learn from Fitzgibbon when it comes to EHR implementation, Tom Jones, the hospital's Director of IT said, "My advice is that they immerse themselves in the EHR environment. Utilize all of the educational resources the EHR vendor offers."

Another word to the wise is to build relationships with a network of providers that are implementing meaningful use.

"It's important that we tear down the walls so that we can share resources," Jones said.

Sharing resources is exactly what the Health Care Collaborative (HCC) of Rural Missouri is doing to help providers like Fitzgibbon meet meaningful use requirements. So far the Lexington, MO-based rural health network has provided Fitzgibbon with $27,000 to support EHR technology equipment purchases. 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.

"As a rural health network, we see first-hand the challenges faced by area practitioners to provide quality patient outcomes while striving to keep pace with advances in health care," said Julie Coram, HCC's Health Information Technology Manager. "These funds will be used to close the rural health chasm by implementing EHRs and enabling patients increased access to specialists, mental health providers and other core services right in their own communities."

Fitzgibbon is one of HCC's eight health information technology partners. The others include Lafayette Regional Health Center, Pathways Community Health, I-70 Community 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.

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.