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Electronic Health Records Initiative Builds on 2008 Success

CHARLESTON – Officials associated with an initiative to promote the use of electronic health records in West Virginia are building this year on their success in 2008 of having the state play a leading role in that effort.

“West Virginia is on the forefront of states leading this initiative,” Patty Ruddick, project director of the West Virginia Health Information Security and Privacy Collaboration, said. “For example, in just the last few months since our Web site became active, it has had many hits.”

The Web site, www.eHealthWV.org, became active in September. A full toolkit of resources, including pamphlets, brochures and posters, that physicians can use to help patients understand the benefits of electronic health records, as well as privacy and security precautions, is available through the Web site.

The eHealthWV initiative, which is funded by a federal grant to educate consumers about electronic health records, is now running public service announcements on television and radio statewide to make West Virginians more familiar with the issues associated with health care providers' ongoing shift from traditional paper records. Those announcements can be played at the Web site.

“We are pleased that Gov. Manchin capped off our efforts in 2008 by proclaiming December as “Health Information Security and Privacy Collaboration Month” and encouraging the use of health information technology and the West Virginia Health Information Network,” Ruddick said.

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As John Wiesendanger, chief executive officer of the West Virginia Medical Institute, recently told members of the Legislature's Joint Committee on Technology, West Virginia is one of just eight states that are creating an inventory of resources for educating and engaging consumers about electronic health records. The other states are: Colorado, Georgia, Kansas, Massachusetts, New York, Oregon and Washington.

Electronic health records and health information exchange are expected to play a bigger role in national health policy in the years ahead. President-elect Barack Obama proposed during his campaign to spend \$50 billion over five years to assist the adoption of electronic health records. Recently, he said that such a program would be part of his economic stimulus package.

"We hope that our efforts will make West Virginia health care providers and consumers well situated to take advantage of such developments," Ruddick said. "Although providers using electronic health records are still in the minority in West Virginia, the number is steadily growing."

The advantages of using electronic health records over traditional paper records include improved quality of health care, fewer medical errors, the ability to track health trends in individual patients and large populations, easier access to data, reduced storage space and storage costs, and more secure backup for records.

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