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Eastern Panhandle Health Care Providers Take Lead in Adoption of Electronic Health Records *Switch Has Quality of Care and Patient Safety Benefits*

MARTINSBURG – At this time, when the nation seems to be poised for significant health care reform, Shenandoah Valley Medical System and West Virginia University Hospitals-East/City Hospital have taken an important step in that direction by implementing electronic health records and health information exchange.

“West Virginia has been leading efforts for providing patients with secure electronic health records, although many health care providers have yet to make the switch from traditional paper records,” Patty Ruddick, project director of the West Virginia Health Information Security and Privacy Collaboration (WV-HISPC), said. “These institutions in the Eastern Panhandle are setting a good example for the rest of the state.”

Since 2005, Shenandoah Valley Medical System has converted more than 70,000 paper health records to electronic health records.

“This change has provided us with real-time access to critical patient information, reduced the cost of long-term record storage and maintenance, provided immediate notification of potentially adverse drug complications, and made it easier to identify community disease patterns,” Randy Jacobs, Shenandoah’s director of administration, said.

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City Hospital implemented an electronic health records system in 2001, and in 2006, the hospital converted all paper documents to electronic records and implemented the use of electronic signatures for all physicians. That system expanded in 2007 to Jefferson Memorial Hospital, providing a common electronic health records system for WVU Hospitals-East. This year, the Bedside Medication Verification function was added to the system to provide an additional safety measure in the administration of medications.

"The use of electronic health records has been a big step forward for us," Rick Holsclaw, division director of information technology at WVU Hospitals-East/City Hospital/Jefferson Memorial Hospital, said. "The next step is to help Eastern Panhandle physicians not already using electronic health records to make the switch."

For more than two years now, Shenandoah and WVU Hospitals-East/City Hospital also have partnered in a pilot health information exchange program, which permits them to electronically transmit to each other such records as laboratory results. Shenandoah physicians who are credentialed at the hospital also have remote access to their patients' inpatient and outpatient charts.

"These are the types of systems we would like more West Virginia providers to adopt," Ruddick said. "Electronic health records and health information exchange improve quality of care and patient safety, as these Eastern Panhandle institutions are demonstrating."

More information on the eHealthWV effort is available at www.eHealthWV.org.

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