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Medical Information Technology

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Electronic Health Record Assistance For South Florida Physicians:

Let's Get Started!

On February 12, 2010 Kathleen Sebelius, Health and Human Services Secretary, announced that South Florida was awarded \$8.5 million in federal funding to establish a South Florida Health Information Technology Regional Extension Center (SFREC). The South Florida area was one of 32 regional extension centers awarded nationwide as part of the nearly \$1 Billion Recovery Act Investment in advancing the use of Health Information Technology. The SFREC is currently the ONLY Regional Extension Center in Florida. The SFREC will support health care professionals in Miami-Dade, Broward, and Monroe Counties with the adoption of electronic medical records. "Health information technology can make our health care system more efficient and improve the quality of care we all receive," said Secretary Sebelius.

The collaborative SFREC initiative includes doctors, hospital systems, medical groups, non-profit organizations, community health centers, universities and private foundations. The SFREC grant was awarded to not-for-profit Miami-based Health Choice Network, a nationally recognized leader in implementing the electronic health records. The co-applicant is the South Florida Health Information Exchange (SFHIE), which is led by the Health Foundation of South Florida. Other major partners include among other health care leaders Jackson Health Systems, Broward Health, Memorial Health Systems, Florida Academy of Family Physicians, Dade County Medical Association, Broward County Medical Association, Monroe County Medical Association, the Health Departments of Miami-Dade, Broward, and Monroe Counties, Miami-Dade Health Action Network, and the South Florida Hospital and Healthcare Association.

South Florida physicians are now eligible to receive educational and technical support to implement medical information technology. "The SFREC will promote the use of health information technology through education, training and technical support. The REC will also help to prepare healthcare professionals to take advantage of federal funding that will be available beginning in 2011 for implementation and support of electronic medical records," said Kevin Kearns, President and CEO of Health Choice Network. Health Choice Network expects to add more than 40 employees during the next three years as the program moves forward. Workforce partners include University of Miami, Florida International University, Miami Dade College, Nova Southeastern University and Broward College.

The SFREC will initially target physicians and other health care professionals who focus on primary care including Family Medicine, Internal Medicine, Pediatrics and OB/GYN. During the application phase, more than 1,800 primary care health professionals in the three counties expressed interest in participating in the SFREC. The SFREC will give technical assistance to providers as they integrate a system to support the electronic health record into their practice. The SFREC will coordinate group purchasing, system implementation, and privacy and security training.

Furthermore, the services provided will guide healthcare professionals towards the goal of improving the quality, efficiency and safety of healthcare delivery in the community.

The focus will be to implement certified Electronic Health Record systems in a "meaningful manner." The meaningful use (MU) includes quality reporting, electronic prescribing and information exchange. MU will be defined in three stages between 2011 and 2015. Among the different MU criteria physicians should maintain, implement and report active medication and allergy lists, patient demographics, changes in vital signs, up-to-date problem list of current and active diagnoses based on ICD-9-CM or SNOWMED CT. Furthermore, healthcare professionals should record smoking status for patients 13 years and older, generate lists of patients by specific conditions to use for quality improvement, reduction of disparities, and outreach. By achieving MU of a certified Electronic Health Record eligible healthcare professionals will receive incentive Medicare & Medicaid payments ranging from \$44,000 to \$63,000.

"This unprecedented funding will position South Florida to use cutting-edge Health Information Technology to improve the health of our community, particularly for vulnerable patients," said Robert Schwartz, M.D., Chair of the University of Miami Miller School of Medicine Department of Family Medicine and Community Health and Co-Chair of the SFHIE. "Medical professionals can improve health care by having access to the complete medical history of the patient. This includes medications, laboratory results and social and family history."

"Health information technology has long been a strategic initiative of the Health Foundation of South Florida," said Steve Marcus, CEO. "We are pleased to be a part of this exciting opportunity that supports the health care professionals in our community. Our ultimate goal is to improve the health care delivery to South Floridians."

Now is the time for physicians to join the historic effort to change health-care delivery and move from volume oriented to value based medical care. I urge all of you to participate in these efforts. For more information on the South Florida Regional Extension Center, call (305) 471-8710 or email info@southfloridaREC.org.

I look forward to reading your comments and suggestions on our blog at:
<http://miamimedblog.blogspot.com/>
or send me a tweet at <http://twitter.com/dadedoc>.

Disclosure: The author is a practicing family physician, addiction specialist and computer consultant. In addition, he is a founder and managing partner of a medical IT company and a member of the SFREC Steering Committee.