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Pennsylvania Begins Big Step Forward on Electronic Health Records, Patient Safety: Consortium Starts Work on e-Health Infrastructure to be Tied into National Efforts

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Pennsylvania Begins Big Step Forward on Electronic Health Records, Patient Safety: Consortium Starts Work on e-Health Infrastructure to be Tied into National Efforts

A consortium of 28 health care organizations plan to build the Pennsylvania electronic patient data network that will be tied into a national system so that patients and their doctors can securely access medical records from any part of the country.

Informally called the Pennsylvania e-Health Technology Consortium, the group says efforts to build and standardize a secure national electronic medical record network will improve patient safety, save on health care spending, and help doctors treat patients faster.

Founded by Quality Insights of Pennsylvania and the Pennsylvania Medical Society, the consortium was sparked by President Bush's call for the health care community to switch from paper to electronic health records within 10 years.

"This consortium will play a major role in the development of Pennsylvania's infrastructure that eventually will move the state light years ahead into the future of health care," said Donald F. Wilson, MD, medical director of Quality Insights of Pennsylvania based in Wayne, PA. "This project will be part of a larger effort that will change the way medicine is practiced throughout the country."

Others agree with Dr. Wilson, and add that the consortium will help patients and their doctors work together.

"Imagine a person from Central Pennsylvania visiting a relative in New Mexico," said William W. Lander, MD, president of the Pennsylvania Medical Society in Harrisburg. "That person for some reason gets violently sick and is rushed to the local emergency room. Once this network is built, that individual's health records essentially travel with him. Emergency medicine physicians at the hospital in New Mexico would be able to securely access the patient's records to learn what conditions he may have or what medications he takes."

The consortium started meeting on March 10 at the Pennsylvania Medical Society and will sponsor a statewide summit in Harrisburg this July to move the project another step forward (see notice on page 12 for more details on the Summit). Details such as standardizing software and ensuring data security are important concerns for the group.

David B. Nash, MD, chair of the Department of Health Policy at Jefferson Medical College in Philadelphia, adds, "This system is the future. And, it will benefit everyone – patients, doctors, hospitals, employers, and insurers. Look for it to revolutionize the American health care system."