

Rural Wisconsin Health Cooperative

NEWS



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### **Grant Moves Rural Hospitals Closer to Electronic Medical Records**

**SAUK CITY (September 10, 2007)** --- Electronic medical records is a goal in nearly every health care setting in the United States, but purchasing the technology and implementing the system in a hospital is expensive. This has led rural hospitals in Wisconsin to look for a new approach. Thanks to a federal grant, they are now closer to their vision for a rural friendly approach to electronic medical records (EMR). A \$1.6 million grant from the Federal Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Services Administration was awarded to the Rural Wisconsin Health Cooperative (RWHC) and the Wisconsin Office of Rural Health to help develop a shared hospital information system for rural hospitals in Wisconsin. Participating hospitals will share some of their staff, computers and software in order to have access to a higher quality system and save significant dollars.

The grant will help launch the Rural Wisconsin Health Cooperative Information Technology Network (RWHC ITN), a non-profit cooperative owned by participating non-profit hospitals, set up to serve rural hospitals and physicians by providing:

- Unified, integrated electronic information to support health care;
- Systems to reduce avoidable medication errors; and,
- Robust and affordable electronic health record (EHR) applications and quality support to ensure its appropriate use.

RWHC has been working hard on the development of this complex initiative for several years. RWHC's Executive Director, Tim Size said "this federal support will go a long way to help achieve our vision to create an affordable, high quality information network for rural Wisconsin hospitals and their patients.

Participation in the network will be open to all rural hospitals in Wisconsin, with St. Joseph's Health Services in Hillsboro, Tomah Memorial Hospital and Memorial Hospital of Lafayette County in Darlington signing on as the first members of the RWHC ITN.

"Consistent with Governor Doyle's Wisconsin eHealth Initiative goals, the RWHC ITN promises to dramatically increase EHR adoption in small and rural Wisconsin hospitals and physician practices," according to Size.

Following an initial implementation period, the organization intends to work with larger hospitals toward a regional data exchange that will further enhance patient safety and health care system efficiency for Wisconsin health providers and all Wisconsin residents.

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