

A Planning Framework for Health Information Exchange in Mendocino and Lake Counties

Background

Today's health care consumers¹ visit multiple health care providers² at multiple sites of care. They fill prescriptions and have lab tests, imaging, procedures and consultations at a variety of locations. Over time, they may change health care providers, travel, or move to other communities. Unfortunately, consumers and their medical care change and move around more easily than their health information does, with frustrating and sometimes life-threatening consequences.

Health systems in some areas in the U.S. now use modern technology to automate and exchange patient information. In Mendocino and Lake Counties, three complementary initiatives are laying the groundwork for electronic health information exchange, motivated by the belief that efficient, appropriate and secure information exchange will help bring about better health care and outcomes for our communities.

- **Redwood Health Information Collaborative (RHIC)** is working on business, governance, legal and policy solutions for health records exchange in this area. A central goal is to improve communication and cooperation among privately and publicly funded providers. The Collaborative was launched in December 2005 by the Mendocino County Department of Public Health, with a grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF).
- **Redwood MedNet** is a non-profit corporation formed in 2005 by local physicians and technologists to demonstrate the secure and appropriate sharing of electronic health files and clinical data and to develop, improve and assist in the implementation of health information technology for all physicians, caregivers and consumers in Northern California. Redwood MedNet is building a clinical messaging service to enable local

¹ In this context, the term consumer means anyone who is either receiving health care or interacting with the health system on behalf of someone else (for example, a family member).

² The term provider covers both individual health care practitioners (physicians and ancillary professionals) and health care institutions.

physicians to exchange patient health records, starting with the delivery of results from analytical laboratories to physicians. The project is funded by a grant from the Blue Shield of California Foundation.

- **Mendocino Health Records Exchange (HRE)** is a demonstration project, administered by Redwood MedNet, that is developing a record locator service prototype as part of the Nationwide Health Information Network (NHIN) initiative. Mendocino HRE began in 2005 and is funded by Connecting for Health and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Participants in the local initiatives and other community leaders have contributed to this Health Information Exchange Planning Framework -- an early step towards a strategic planning process.

- Healthcare Delivery Organizations
- Healthcare Providers
- Service Providers (Labs, etc.)
- Patients and Consumers
- Payers

As planning proceeds, there will be opportunities to modify this framework, identify objectives, specify action steps and refine timetables for achieving the goals. The principles that guide this effort, align with the policy and technology priorities articulated by Connecting for Health³, a national private-public collaborative that has worked for many years to realize the full potential of information technology in health and health care.

³ The Connecting for Health principles are outlined on pages 4-5 of its Common Framework overview, <http://www.connectingforhealth.org/commonframework/overview.html>

Vision Statement

Mendocino and Lake Counties will have effective and efficient health information exchange that enables high quality, timely and accessible health care, including the management of chronic and complex conditions, across all sites of care. Health care consumers will use information resources to more effectively manage their health, in partnership with their providers. Community health will improve through coordinated care and the timely reporting of communicable diseases.

Guiding Principles for Health Information Exchange

Health information exchange in Mendocino and Lake counties will:

- Provide secure patient access to their own health records.
- Respect privacy as a core value.
- Facilitate the individual and collective practice of medicine.
- Interconnect all providers of health care for Mendocino and Lake County residents.
- Harmonize with regional, State and Federal health information exchange initiatives.
- Evolve with technology standards and needs.

Goals and Areas for Action

Successful health information exchange in Mendocino and Lake Counties depends on progress toward five interdependent goals:

- Efficient sharing of clinical and public health information
- Community-wide provider engagement
- Community-wide consumer engagement
- Financial sustainability
- Functional governance

Achieving these goals requires planning and action in the following areas:

- Communication, Education and Outreach
- Organizational, Legal and Policy Development
- Business Planning
- Technical Infrastructure Development

The following outlines present beginning steps in each of these areas.

Activities / Action Areas

Communication, Education and Outreach

1. Devise a communications and education plan for all audiences, to evolve in response to new inputs
2. Develop informational materials on the benefits of participation in community health information exchange and on operations to date
3. Survey providers and consumers
4. Convene stakeholder forums and public meetings

Organizational, Legal and Policy Development

1. Finalize and implement User Agreements
2. Establish a functional governing entity
3. Finalize policies, consent forms and information materials related to privacy and security
4. Establish mechanisms for consumer representation
5. Implement protocols based on industry standards

Business Planning

1. Evaluate current utilization of health care dollars across Mendocino and Lake Counties and identify opportunities to optimize utilization.
2. Develop a business plan.
3. Enhance ROI by driving down costs and expanding the user base.
4. Secure new grants.

Technical Infrastructure Development

1. Provide demonstrable and replicable models.
2. Offer technical assistance to participating providers.
3. Adopt industry standard best practices for security and privacy
4. Integrate mechanisms for assessing and improving quality of care
5. Provide access to best practice guidelines and other tools to protect patient safety