- - D R A F T - -
A Planning Framework for Health Information Exchange in Lake and Mendocino Counties[1]

Background

Today's health care consumers[2] visit multiple health care providers[3] 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, people's health information does not move around nearly as easily as they do. This can have frustrating or even 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. The projects are 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**[4] (RHIC) is a community committee working on business, governance, legal and policy solutions for health records exchange in Lake and Mendocino Counties. A key goal of the Collaborative 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,[5] with a grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.[6]

> **Redwood MedNet**[7] is a non-profit corporation formed in 2005 by local physicians and technologists. The mission of Redwood MedNet is 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. Starting with 25 practices, Redwood MedNet is building a clinical message service to enable local physicians to exchange patient health

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[1] **Redwood Health Information Collaborative** thanks Susan Baird Kanaan, a Ukiah-based health policy consultant, for drafting this paper.

[2] 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).

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

[4] http://mendocinohre.org/rhic/

[5] http://www.co.mendocino.ca.us/ph/

[6] http://www.rwjf.org

[7] http://www.redwoodmednet.org

records.   Funded by a grant from the Blue Shield of California Foundation,[8] the first phase of the clinical message service will deliver test results from analytical laboratories to physicians.

Mendocino Health Records Exchange[9] (HRE) is a demonstration project, administered by Redwood MedNet, that is developing a record locator service prototype conforming to the Connecting for Health Common Framework as part of the Nationwide Health Information Network (NHIN) initiative.   Mendocino HRE began in 2005 and is funded by Connecting for Health[10] and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.[11]

A broad range of community stakeholders stand to benefit from a secure and reliable electronic health information exchange that enables health care providers to get the information they need when they need it so they can care for their patients.   The stakeholders include not only consumers and their healthcare providers, but also healthcare delivery organizations, ancillary service providers (Laboratories, etc.), public health programs, and payers.

Vision

Long-term vision
Mendocino and Lake Counties will have effective and efficient health information exchange that enables high quality, timely and accessible health care across all sites of care.   Health care providers and consumers, in partnership, will use information resources to more effectively manage health. Community health and preparedness will improve through planning, coordinated care and the timely reporting of communicable diseases.

Near-term vision
In two years Redwood MedNet will:

- Sponsor speakers and presentations on a variety of timely topics to help local health care providers improve their understanding and utilization of health information technology
- Facilitate implementation of EHR solutions at dozens of local practices
- Deliver daily clinical results (e.g., Laboratory & Radiology results) to 50% of health care providers in Mendocino and Lake counties.
- Deliver annually via the clinical message service thousands of reportable communicable disease events per year to Public Health in Mendocino, Lake and Sonoma counties.
- Provide direct data feeds (Laboratory & Radiology results) to up to 6 different EHR packages in local use.
- Establish a business operations plan that is not dependent upon grant funding

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[8]   http://www.blueshieldcafoundation.org
[9]   http://mendocinohre.org/hre.html
[10]   http://www.connectingforhealth.org
[11]   http://www.hhs.gov/healthit/

The Planning Framework

This framework is a step toward a strategic planning process for health information exchange.   It was developed by a broad-based group of community leaders (see Appendix 1).   As planning proceeds, these individuals and others can use this framework to identify objectives, specify action steps and develop timetables for achieving goals.   Initial plans can address a two-year time frame; thereafter, planning can continue on an annual basis or when major funding or scope changes occur.

Guiding Principles

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 excellence in 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.
- Contribute to more efficient and effective use of health care resources.

These principles align with the policy and technology priorities articulated by Connecting for Health,[12] a national private-public collaborative that has worked for many years to realize the full potential of information technology in health and health care.

Goals

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

1. Efficient sharing of clinical and public health information
2. Community-wide provider engagement
3. Community-wide consumer engagement
4. Financial sustainability
5. Collaborative governance

Areas for Planning and Action

Achieving these goals requires planning and action in the following areas, with attention to the interests and needs of each stakeholder group:

A. Collaboration, communication and outreach
B. Organizational, legal and policy development
C. Business planning
D. Technical infrastructure development

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[12]   See Appendix 2.

The remainder of this document outlines beginning steps in each of these areas.

Action Areas and Activities

A. Collaboration, Communication and Outreach

1. Devise a communications 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. Identify and survey providers and consumers.
4. Convene stakeholder forums and public meetings.
5. Build community-wide coalitions.

B. Organizational, Legal and Policy Development

1. Finalize and implement User Agreements.
2. Determine the organizational composition and develop the resources to support it.
3. Finalize policies, consent forms and information materials related to privacy and security.
4. Establish mechanisms for consumer representation.
5. Implement risk-management protocols based on industry standards.

C. 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 further funding (grant or loan).

D. 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.

Appendix 1

Participants in the Planning Process

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Ana Mahoney -- Director, Mendocino County Department of Mental Health

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Appendix 2

Connecting for Health

Better Health Through Information Sharing

Connecting for Health is working to realize the full potential of information technology in health and health care, while protecting patient privacy and the security of personal health information. This public-private collaborative of more than 100 organizations is committed to enabling health professionals and patients to use information technology so that they can achieve the best care possible in emergency and routine situations, as well as in managing chronic illness. Connecting for Health was created by the Markle Foundation, and, is led and managed by Markle. The collaborative is funded by both Markle and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

About the Connecting for Health Common Framework

The Common Framework helps health information networks to share information among their members and nationwide while protecting privacy and allowing for local autonomy and innovation. It consists of a set of mutually-reinforcing technical documents and specifications, testing interfaces, code, privacy and security policies, and model contract language. It was developed by experts in information technology, health privacy law and policy, and has been tested since mid-2005 by Connecting for Health prototype teams in three states.

The Framework includes eight Policy Guides for protecting information and six Technical Guides for exchanging it.

Excerpt from the Connecting for Health Common Framework

If we are to share health information in a way that is trusted and effective, the policies that establish who has access to health information, what uses of information are acceptable, the extent to which patients can give or withhold access to their information, and the design of privacy and security safeguards must all be crafted in parallel with the design and deployment of the technology. And the technology choices themselves must incorporate policy objectives that protect patients and our society's values.

For more information see *http://www.connectingforhealth.org*