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## Op-Ed Commentaries

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### Kenneth W. Kizer and Peter J. Groen: W.Va. a leader in health info

By Kenneth W. Kizer

and Peter J. Groen

As Congress deliberates the economic stimulus package aimed at, among other things, accelerating use and adoption of health information technology, leaders would be well served to look to West Virginia's example as a guide for how to accomplish this objective in a cost-effective fashion.

West Virginia has quietly become a national leader in the use of health information technology, particularly in the area of "open-source" electronic health record solutions that are used by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and Indian Health Service. These high-value systems, developed with a substantial investment of federal funds over the past 30 years, have been adapted and are being used in a number of innovative ways to improve the health of West Virginians:

- The state Department of Health and Human Resources has just completed rolling out Bar Code Medication Administration in all eight state hospitals. This technology, developed by the VA in the late 1990s, has been shown to reduce the overwhelming majority of medication errors among hospitalized patients.
- DHHR completed implementation of OpenVista, the commercial version of the internationally known electronic health records used by the VA last fall. This means that all federal and state hospitals in West Virginia now use essentially the same system. No other state has done this.
- West Virginia University Hospitals recently launched the second phase of implementing a proprietary electronic health records system.
- The Community Health Network of West Virginia finished installing MedLynks™ RPMS, a cousin of OpenVista, in 30 clinic locations located across the state last year, and continues to implement MedLynk RPMS at additional sites. (RPMS is currently used by the Indian Health Service at almost 200 of its facilities.)
- A recent survey conducted by the Shepherd University Research Corp. found that 76 percent of state hospitals have at least begun implementing an electronic health records system; this is among the highest rates, if not the highest, in the nation.

These are important developments that will result in higher quality and safer health care, reduced costs and saved lives. The people of West Virginia should take pride in these accomplishments - and look forward to completion of additional efforts underway.

Gov. Manchin's strategic plan for improving health care in West Virginia envisions important improvements, including installing electronic medical records in all hospitals and clinics in the state; implementing the West Virginia Health Information Network - a statewide network to improve information flow between different types of healthcare facilities; implementing a new web-based Medicaid claims management system to more efficiently process claims and better detect fraud and abuse; expanding use of personal health records; and continuing to increase e-prescribing.

Under the leadership of DHHR Secretary Martha Walker and Medicaid Commissioner Marsha Morris, the department has launched a Medicaid transformation initiative aimed at creating "medical homes" for Medicaid patients. Medical homes use "health information exchange" technology to connect different types of electronic medical records so that they are integrated to provide more complete information so that doctors can better treat chronic diseases like diabetes and heart disease and more effectively work to keep people healthy.

The Medicaid program has established the West Virginia Health Improvement Institute and an Innovation Community to teach caregivers how to integrate health information technology and medical home concepts to support patient education and self-management. Pilot programs to show the effectiveness of these efforts are underway. The West Virginia Medicaid program competed for funding from the federal Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services to support these efforts.

Further, the West Virginia Telehealth Alliance is one of 69 programs across the country that has been funded to enhance broadband capacity for nearly 300 participating facilities supporting telehealth and HIT applications in West Virginia.

Clearly, West Virginia has taken the initiative and is aggressively moving forward to improve health care using a blend of open source and commercial health-care IT systems. There is much the rest of the nation can learn from West Virginia's experience.

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