Alabama continues implementation of health information exchange

One Health Record® emerging as important tool for primary care

Every day in Alabama, health professionals and patients exchange information during patient visits and other interactions. With good information, patients' health care needs can be managed effectively. However, this is not always possible despite the proliferation of the Internet, smartphones, tablets and cloud technology.

All that is changing.

Today, One Health Record®, Alabama's Health Information Exchange (HIE), is not only operational, but is emerging as an important tool as Alabama Medicaid and other organizations move toward value-based healthcare systems. The project is now under development as a pilot initiative in eight east Alabama counties where eight hospitals and 19 practices have or are in the process of connecting to have data exchange capability. Between February and May of 2015, more than 260 individual users sent and received approximately 1128 secure messages while nearly 54,000 query transactions to pull data were recorded.

The move to implement health data exchanges nationally has been fueled by Medicare, and private insurers as emphasis shifts to quality and outcomes over visits and volume. Medicaid's planned Regional Care Organizations hope to incorporate the HIE system as well.

State Health Information Technology Director Paul Brannan explains that the state's One Health Record® system offers providers options ranging from secure messaging to query-based exchange. "Providers now can log on and see all of Medicaid's and CHIP (AllKids) claims information or look at the Continuity of Care Documents (CCD),"he said.

At a minimum, providers can see a claims-based patient history to include visits to the hospital or emergency room along with information on drug, lab and outpatient encounters. Providers may also securely email other providers in the system and exchange information on patients that both are serving. Providers who connect to the interoperable or query-based exchange also have the opportunity to obtain information on a real-time basis. That not only includes claims, but information from other providers connected in the system. And, if providers are interested in connecting their own electronic medical record systems, Brannan and his staff are available to work with the provider's EMR vendor to make the necessary connections.

One of the most important things to know about One Health Record® is that security and protecting patient health data are a top priority. To do that, the Alabama's HIE has taken steps to meet or exceed all industry standards for data protection and security while still making data sharable, according to Brannan.

"We understand that security of health information is critical to success," Brannan emphasized, noting that an external group conducts a security assessment every six months. In addition to system security, the system is set up for providers to flag patient records with substance abuse and mental health diagnoses so they will not be shared. Providers are also required to provide patients with an opportunity to "opt-out" of the One Health Record® system.

Future plans call for adding system capability to offer ADT (Admission, Discharge,Transfer) alerting so physicians know of these important transitions proactively instead of after the fact. It would enable the documentation of care coordination between the hospital, ER and primary medical provider which is expected to be required under Meaningful Use 3, Brannan said.

"I encourage providers to reach out to us because we want to hear from you about any functions and capabilities that are not there. It is our goal to be open and responsive to the needs of providers, because we share your interest in providing better care."

If the state is successful in gaining federal approval of its 1115 request now before the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid services, Brannan hopes to have funds to support provider connectivity on a statewide basis.

However, connectivity is just the beginning, he says. "We hope that by connecting, providers will have greater opportunities for professional collaboration, that there will be enhanced communication between providers and patients and ultimately, better care based on timely and complete information."

More information is available at www.onehealthrecord.alabama.gov.