

Pilot project connects physicians to state health information exchange

Thirteen. It's a small number, but a big milestone for Medicaid technology professionals who this month marked another "first" in their quest to connect various electronic health record systems (EHRs) to One Health Record®, Alabama's electronic health information exchange.

The latest effort, the connection of 13 physician practices to the state's cloud-based exchange, marked the first time that individual providers agreed to connect to the state system simply by connecting to their own in-office electronic health record system, regardless of the brand of system used. In the first round of connections, four different vendors will be involved.

With the new connections, providers will be able to securely retrieve information while receiving notices when their patients are admitted, discharged or transferred between hospital and home or other care location. The system also allows for the exchange of patient information between primary care providers and specialists who have connected as well.

According to HIE Operations Consultant Bill Mixon, the connections are continuation of a pilot project in east Alabama to help providers test new technology to securely exchange patient data. The pilot project will eventually connect electronic health record systems at East Alabama Medical Center in Opelika, Lanier Memorial Hospital in Valley, four referring clinics in the area and approximately 15 local physicians. The Opelika hospital connected to the system in 2013. The new clinics, practices and Valley hospital are expected to connect as providers' EHR vendors are able to transition to the network.

Project success will mean looking beyond the physical connections to understand the relational challenges and workflow changes that come with connecting to an interoperable health information exchange, he explained.

"Electronic systems intrude on the relationship providers have with each other as well as the workflow," he said, noting that this affects referrals and doctors' relationships with their colleagues and how patients are managed within the practice. "As we meet with providers, we are learning more about the thoughts and issues of the provider community and how we can address them."

While the pilot is focused in east Alabama, Mixon is interested in hearing from physicians in other areas of the state who are interested in connecting to the new system. To find out more, physicians should contact Project Manager Meghan Youngpeter at (334) 353-4463 or by email at meghan.youngpeter@medicaid.alabama.gov

