

PRESS RELEASE

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SAFETY NET PROVIDERS IN EI DORADO COUNTY TO BUILD ELECTRONIC HEALTHCARE COMMUNICATIONS SYSTEM WITH NEW \$1.5 MILLION FEDERAL GRANT

Placerville, CA - Marshall Medical Center - in collaboration with Barton Memorial Hospital, the El Dorado County Public Health and Mental Health Departments, and the El Dorado County Community Health Center - has been awarded an estimated \$1.5 million health information technology grant from the federal Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ). Through the grant, an electronic communications system will be created to help health care providers improve and coordinate care for uninsured and underinsured patients in El Dorado County. First year funding for the three-year project is \$497,395.

The focal point of the grant project will be a secure web-based Master Patient Index that will coordinate sharing of patient demographic data among authorized health care providers. "The idea here is to put the patient at the center of our care system," said Gregory W. Bergner, M.D., the principle investigator for the project. "Our current modes of communication - phone, fax machines, and paper records - are labor intensive and inefficient."

With the new electronic system, data will be tagged to each patient's primary care provider. When a patient visits a specialist or is admitted to an emergency room, his or her demographic information will already be in the system, and can be downloaded. Results data will automatically be sent to the primary care provider electronically.

"By integrating information systems so that they can 'talk' to each other and share information when providers most need it, we can improve efficiency, as well as provide better and more coordinated care," said Bergner. "Integrated electronic communication will be particularly important to managing chronic illness."

Marshall Medical Center submitted the grant on behalf of numerous agencies in El Dorado County who are part of a local initiative called ACCEL (Access El Dorado). ACCEL aims to improve access to, and quality of care, for the underinsured population of El Dorado County.

"Something that is very unique to El Dorado County is the level of collaboration between independent, community hospitals and county agencies involved in the safety net provider network that allows us to obtain grants such as this one," said Shannon Truesdell, Marshall Medical Center assistant administrator. "This collaboration has tremendous value in implementing programs that enhance community health."

Marshall Medical Center is one of 16 grantees selected by AHRQ to complete projects considered key to the nation's 10-year strategy to bring health care into the 21st century by advancing the use of information technology (IT). "This project is part of a national movement to make our health care system better and safer through smart use of information technology," said AHRQ Director Carolyn M. Clancy, M.D. "It is very exciting to see this project move from concept and planning to implementation and real-world impact."

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AHRQ launched its health IT initiative to advance national goals for modernizing health care through the best and most effective use of IT. With the 16 new grants, AHRQ has invested \$166 million in grants and contracts in 41 states to support and stimulate investment in health IT, especially in rural and underserved areas. Together, these projects form a nationwide learning laboratory of health care systems, hospitals, physician practices, research institutes, nursing homes and other organizations that are being helped to transform everyday clinical practice through health IT.

To support its health IT initiative, AHRQ established the National Resource Center for Health Information Technology, which provides technical assistance to all of AHRQ's health IT grantees and serves as the link between the health care community at large and the researchers and experts who are on the front lines of health IT. The National Resource Center will also disseminate new tools, best practices, and research results produced by this unique real-world laboratory for examining health IT at work.

For more information on AHRQ's health IT initiative, visit: <http://healthit.ahrq.gov>.

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