

The Delaware Health Information Network -- July 2008

By Sens. Joe Biden and Tom Carper (both D-DE) and Rep. Mike Castle (R-DE)

Healthcare in the 21st century starts with the undertaking of even greater advances in care and the treatment of diseases.

A leading example of such advancement right here in the First State is the Delaware Health Information Network (DHIN), a real-time electronic information exchange program among health care providers (doctor's offices, hospitals, pharmacies, laboratories, etc.) which gives them the opportunity to quickly and accurately access vital information about their patients' health history. It uses a method similar to Google and other search engines to locate and deliver files over a secure network, so these exchanges of vital information can occur in as fast as five seconds.

This technology has the potential to significantly improve the delivery of healthcare in Delaware and, eventually, across the nation. For example, instead of pharmacists having to call physicians to clarify illegibly written prescriptions, or worse, providing a wrong dosage, the DHIN will electronically send clear, concise prescriptions within a matter of seconds, reducing the need for phone calls as well as the number of medical errors due to dosage errors. If you are from Newark and are spending the day at Bethany Beach and require a trip to an urgent care clinic, the doctor treating you may soon be able to access your records from your primary care physician and know what medicines you are currently taking to avoid any adverse reactions from drugs that do not mix well together. While there are many more possible benefits available from the DHIN, these two examples demonstrate how improved health information technology has the potential to appreciably reduce the 100,000 lives a year presently lost to medical errors.

The idea for this network in Delaware first took shape in 1997, when the Legislature created the DHIN as a public instrument of the state to spur the establishment of a statewide health information and electronic data network for public and private use. Functioning under the direction and control of the Delaware Health Care Commission, the DHIN has continuously gained momentum thanks to the collaboration and support of Delaware physicians, hospitals, laboratories, community organizations, patients, and government officials. As your representatives in Washington, we are extremely proud to have worked together to help secure approximately \$5 million in federal funding for DHIN to help it grow and eventually benefit every adult and child across the state.

To our good fortune, in April of 2007, Delaware became the first state to utilize this type of network system statewide. Its implementation dramatically improved the speed, accuracy, and availability of lab results, radiology reports, pathology tests, and hospital admission, discharge and transfer reports—all of which would otherwise be received by mail or fax. Providers participating in the DHIN currently have three methods from which to choose to receive secure patient data from other participating providers: an electronic inbox (e-mail), an electronic health records (EHR) interface, or an auto-print option from a network printer.

Bayhealth Medical Center, Beebe Medical Center, Christiana Care Health System, and LabCorp were the first participating providers; currently, more than 260 physicians at 65 primary care and specialty sites as well as the four Federally Qualified Health Centers in Delaware also participate. Each month, DHIN completes 1.7 million information transactions, representing 81% of Delaware's hospital admissions and 85% of outpatient laboratory results.

This widespread success has positioned DHIN at the forefront of a national movement to unify health records not only within states but also throughout our entire country. Just last month, Delaware was selected as one of 12 communities throughout the country to participate in a national Medicare demonstration project that provides incentive payments to physicians for using certified electronic health records. As Deputy Secretary Troy of the federal Department of Health and Human Services noted in the announcement ceremony at Christiana Care in Newark, the project spans a five-year period, beginning in 2009, and is expected to improve the quality of care provided to approximately 3.6 million Americans in the participating communities.

Delaware and our nation stand to greatly benefit from this demonstration project by further developing DHIN's capabilities with EHR's and by giving more and more physicians the incentive to use such technology. Some of the advantages EHR's provide include:

- Improved quality of care as doctors access more information in less time;
- More proactive role of patients in their treatment due to the increased availability of information;
- Increased patient safety with fewer adverse drug interactions and redundant tests;
- Improved administrative efficiency at care centers resulting in cost savings; and
- Enhanced privacy through more direct and regulated channels of communication.

We feel very strongly that Delawareans deserve the best possible care, which is why we have worked hard to help facilitate the growth and success of the Delaware Health Information Network. It is a critical tool for promoting health and increasing the efficiency of our overall system of healthcare.

We are proud to say that Delaware is the leader in our nation's ongoing effort to provide better quality healthcare at a lower cost to more Americans.