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Doctors and Hospitals Receive Funding to Adopt Technology to Improve Patient Care

Seattle, WA -- More than 40 physician practices, health clinics and hospitals, primarily in small and rural communities throughout the Pacific Northwest, are getting help to improve health care for their patients through information technology.

Health care providers throughout Washington, Alaska, Idaho and Oregon have been selected to receive up to \$20,000 from an innovative public-private partnership, the Washington Health Information Collaborative. The organization is comprised of First Choice Health, the Washington State Health Care Authority (HCA), the Puget Sound Health Alliance and Qualis Health. First Choice Health and the HCA have contributed a million dollars (\$500,000 each) to the awards fund for 2008. This year, the Health Care Authority is funding three larger grants of up to \$50,000 each to address communitywide provider engagement and connectivity efforts. Organizational and in-kind services are contributed by the Alliance and Qualis. This is the fourth year of the awards program that has now distributed about \$3 million to health care providers since 2005.

“We are intentionally targeting smaller and more rural physicians’ practices for these awards,” says First Choice Health President/CEO Ken Hamm, “because we want to be sure that all people, even if they don’t live in the region’s big cities, have access to the best health care available. The cost of technological innovation is much greater for small physician practices than for large ones because there is less economy of scale.”

“The use of information technology, such as electronic medical records, is a proven way to reduce medical errors, provide effective care more consistently to all patients and to be more efficient,” says Steve Hill, Administrator of the Washington State Health Care Authority. “By focusing on rural areas and smaller cities, the State is taking steps to ensure that all Washingtonians will benefit from a more efficient health care system.”

Too many doctors’ offices and hospitals still rely on paper files, FAXes, phone calls and faulty memories. When medical histories are piecemeal, that affects health care quality and cost. The American health care system is finally starting to use the same type of technology that banks have used for years in ATMs and that most businesses in nearly every other industry use to operate effectively and efficiently.

Doc's get dollars to adopt technology for patients
October 7, 2008
Page 2 of 2 pages

The health information technology awards are intended to improve health care safety, quality and cost by enabling physicians and other practitioners to instantly and securely access accurate individual patient medical records, in addition to looking at aggregated data among all their patients for improved decision-making. As health care quality comparison reports become more common, physicians and hospitals are adopting technology to help them more consistently provide care that is effective in keeping their patients as healthy as possible.

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First Choice Health (www.fchn.com) is a regionally-based hospital- and physician-owned company that provides health care services to more than one million members in Alaska, Idaho, Oregon and Washington state. The company emphasizes quality health care, public service and bringing technology to benefit health care practitioners and patients.

The **Washington State Health Care Authority** (www.hca.wa.gov) is a cabinet level agency that administers health programs and provides access to high-quality health care for more than 500,000 Washington residents, including 316,000 state and local government employees and 128,000 enrollees in Basic Health, a state-subsidized program for low-income families. HCA's mission is to make affordable health care accessible by delivering the best value in health care to all enrollees through efficient procurement strategies and cost-effective health-care delivery systems.

The **Puget Sound Health Alliance** (www.pugetsoundhealthalliance.org) is a non-profit made up of those who provide, pay for and use health care, working together to improve quality of care at a price more people can afford. More than 50 individuals and 170 organizations have joined the Alliance, including many employers, physician clinics, hospitals, consumer groups, unions and trusts, health plans and others. The Alliance produces the Community Checkup, a report on health care performance in the Puget Sound region. For the full report, go to www.WACommunityCheckup.org.

Qualis Health (www.qualishealth.org) is dedicated to improving the quality of healthcare delivery and health outcomes for individuals and populations across the nation. In operation since 1974, the non-profit, healthcare quality improvement organization (QIO) is headquartered in Seattle, Washington and has offices in Alaska, Idaho, California, South Carolina and Nebraska. Qualis Health holds QIO contracts with the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services in Idaho and Washington.

Attachment: Full list of award recipients in Washington, Oregon, Alaska and Idaho

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