

Indiana Health Info Exchange hits critical mass

By Heather B. Hayes

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Indiana Health Information Exchange (IHIE) officials have made good on a long-term goal to expand the Indiana Network for Patient Care (INPC), its data exchange platform, to the far edges of the state's healthcare market. At present, 62 of 114 medical facilities in Indiana have signed contracts to exchange information via the INPC, and 41 of those are now up and running.

Last week, Good Samaritan Hospital in Vincennes, Ind., became the most recent medical facility to start exchanging patient data over the INPC. The hospital, a 232-bed community health care facility, serves patients that reside in both southeastern Illinois and southwestern Indiana.

The INPC is one of the highest volume HIEs in the U.S., handling more than 2.5 million transactions a day and containing the health records of more than 10.3 million patients. It was created in 1994 by the Regenstrief Institute, an informatics and healthcare research organization in Indianapolis, but has been taken over recently by IHIE, which also offers a clinical messaging system and a quality improvement reporting initiative.

"Healthcare doesn't follow geographic borders very well, so as we get to the outer reaches of Indiana, it's inevitable that we are going to end up with patients and activities that cross into other states," said Dr. Marc Overhage, president and CEO of IHIE and director of medical informatics at Regenstrief Institute.

In fact, one INPC member, Sisters of St. Francis Health System, has two hospitals and a large laboratory facility in south Chicago, and 1,500 of the 14,000 physicians that subscribe to IHIE's Docs4Docs, an electronic clinical messaging service, are located in other states.

Overhage noted that expanding to Indiana's border areas has enabled IHIE to work with and tie into other regional HIEs. These include HealthBridge, which, although based in Cincinnati, serves several hospitals in southeastern Indiana and northern Kentucky, and the Michiana Health Information Network, which exchanges information between hospitals, health providers and healthcare entities in northern Indiana and southern Michigan.

IHIE officials hope that stimulus money will allow an even more robust statewide network. "We have made great progress, but there are clearly areas of the state where we do not yet have a footprint," Overhage said.

Indiana this week received a four-year \$10.3 million grant through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act's State Health Information Exchange Cooperative Agreement Program (CAP) that will be used to extend the reach of IHIE and other state and regional HIEs to underserved areas in Indiana.