

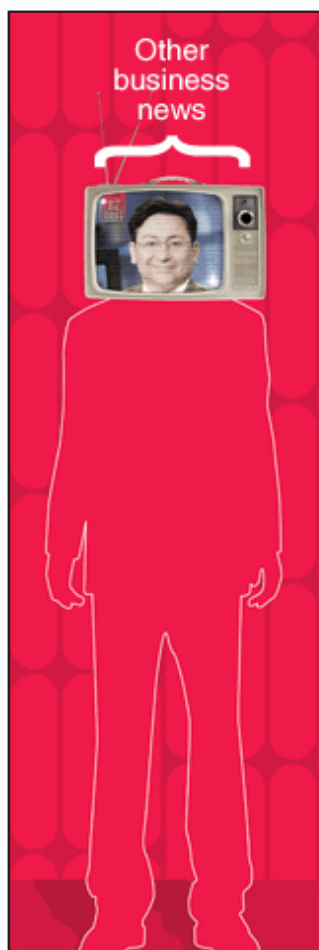
Wednesday, October 31, 2007

Metrics missionaries launch doctor visits

It's not exactly the Great Commission, but it's a start. The Indiana Health Information Exchange sent forth a handful of staff people last week to a small physician practice to show charts full of performance metrics, which are meant to help doctors improve the quality of care they provide.

That visit to Community Pediatrics in Indianapolis, albeit a small step, marked a major transition for the program, called Quality Health First. After 2-and-a-half years building the computer backbone to provide this information, the Quality Health First program is finally distributing its information to independent doctors.

Armed with this information, doctors can be better caregivers. At least that's the belief of officials at the health information exchange. Their other hope is that better-quality care leads to less expensive care.



For example, if the metrics show that only half of a family doctor's diabetic patients have their blood glucose under control, she could spend more time with those uncontrolled patients to improve their diet, exercise or medication regimen. The Quality Health First service also could send electronic reminders or alerts to discuss glucose levels when one of the uncontrolled patients comes to see the doctor.

Normally, a doctor would get no reimbursement for spending more time talking to a patient. But the Quality Health First program has secured commitments from insurance companies to pay bonuses to doctors who improve their patients' health. Insurers figure that if a doctor paid more attention to patients in an early diabetic stage, fewer patients would develop expensive complications, such as kidney or eye disease.

"I passionately believe it will improve quality," said Marc Overhage, CEO of the Indiana Health Information Exchange. He added, "This is where we have a real chance to make a real difference in health care."

The health information exchange is working to hire a medical director to lead its itinerant information missionaries and to help small physician practices develop strategies to use the information to improve their patients' health.

The exchange has a \$1.7 million, two-year grant from the Regenstrief Foundation to help get the effort started. In addition, Quality Health First has received funding from the Fairbanks Foundation and a promise for funding from health insurers such as WellPoint Inc.

The Quality Health First program compiles patient information from insurance claims and from a massive medical record system run by the Regenstrief Institute.

Quality Health First was a brainchild of the Employers' Forum of Indiana, a group of Indiana employers working to improve health care in central Indiana.