

Morehouse PC center to oversee regional EMR centers in Georgia

The U.S. Health Information Technology for Economic and Clinical Health (HITECH) Act of 2009 established a health information technology (HIT) extension program, which consists of regional extension centers and a national health information technology research center (HITRC).

The regional centers will support health care providers in their efforts to become meaningful users of electronic health records (EHR) – including technical assistance and information on best practices.

Medicare and Medicaid physicians who meet certain criteria can qualify for financial incentives that are available under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (go to www.mag.org/pdfs/ehr_hitech_presentation_022310.pdf for details).

The HITECH program will establish some 70 regional extension centers across the U.S. – each serving a defined geographic area. Each center will support at least 100,000 priority primary care providers (i.e., small practices and those serving safety-net populations).

The National Center for Primary Care at the Morehouse School of Medicine in Atlanta has oversight for the Georgia HIT Extension Center (GA-HITREC), which will consist of 18 “adoption centers” that will overlay the 18 public health districts in Georgia.

“Our mission is to help Georgia’s health care providers select, successfully implement, and meaningfully use certified electronic health record systems to improve clinical outcomes and the quality of care provided to their patients,” says Dominic H. Mack, M.D., the deputy director at Morehouse who is overseeing the GA-HITREC program. “We will work collaboratively with our valued partners to facilitate the adoption and meaningful use of health information technology, or HIT, to improve the health of the greater community while eliminating the disparate gap of health care throughout Georgia.”

Dr. Mack says GA-HITREC will use a community-oriented approach to provide outreach and education and work with its partners to develop and implement programs to meet meaningful use objectives.

“We will offer equitable group purchasing agreements of select HIT products that meet provider’s needs and help them to meet patient-centered medical home standards,” he says.

Dr. Mack explains that GA-HITREC will build competent outreach/education and technical teams to achieve the program's objectives and to grow Georgia's HIT workforce, adding that, "This work will be done in collaboration with the Georgia Department of Community Health (DCH) and the statewide health information exchange that it's creating."

He also states that, "It is our intent to provide excellent quality service to our customers in order to build a national reputation as a reliable HIT resource for providers. We're aiming for a 65 percent EHR implementation rate among our priority primary care provider practices in the state of Georgia during the first four years of this program."

In terms of specifics, Dr. Mack says the GA-HITREC will support the target health care providers in Georgia with direct, individualized, and on-site technical assistance in...

- Selecting a certified EHR product
- Achieving effective implementation of a certified EHR product
- Enhancing clinical and administrative workflows to optimally leverage an EHR system's potential to improve the quality and value of care, including patient experience as well as outcome of care
- Observing and complying with applicable legal, regulatory, professional, and ethical requirements to protect the integrity, privacy, and security of patients' health information

Dr. Mack says the new national Health Information Technology Research Center (HITRC) will gather relevant information on effective practices from a wide variety of sources across the country and help the regional extension centers collaborate with one another and with relevant stakeholders to identify and share best practices in EHR adoption, effective use, and provider support.

He adds, "The HITRC will build a virtual community of shared learning to advance best practices that support providers' adoption and meaningful use of EHR."

Along with the Medical Association of Georgia, Dr. Mack says GA-HITREC's key partners include the Georgia Department of Community Health, the Georgia Medical Care Foundation, Georgia Institute of Technology, the Georgia Academy of Family Physicians, the Georgia Partnership for TeleHealth, the Hispanic Coalition of Georgia, the Georgia Chapter of the American College of

Physicians, the Georgia Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics, the Georgia Association of Primary Care, the Georgia State Medical Association, the Georgia Board of Regents, the Technical College System of Georgia, the Northwest Georgia Healthcare Partnership, and the Georgia Hospital Association.

“I’m excited about having a regional extension center in Georgia,” MAG Electronic Health Care Committee Chair Jack M. Chapman Jr., M.D., says of GA-HITREC. “This is going to be an excellent resource to assist physicians to become meaningful users of electronic medical records, especially when it comes to the technical assistance component.”

Contact Dr. Mack at dmack@msm.edu with questions about GA-HITREC. Go to www.primarycareforall.org and www.healthit.hhs.gov for additional information. And monitor www.mag.org/electronichealthcare for the latest electronic health care developments.