



# Quest Physician Update

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## Transforming Healthcare-Together.

Dear Colleagues,

A lot is happening in healthcare IT, in central Illinois and across the country. Thanks to the HITECH Act, unprecedented levels of federal support are available. Expect a laser focus on transitioning to electronic medical records and building connections over the next four years. We are at the precipice of a rapid transition to fully enabled, electronic healthcare communications.

Dr. David Blumenthal, HHS National Coordinator for Health Information Technology, calls information the 'life blood' of healthcare. He states that, "Information should follow the patient, and artificial obstacles – technical, business related, bureaucratic – should not get in the way." The HITECH Act will eliminate barriers that restrict information exchange across provider or network boundaries, solving the long-standing dilemma of information silos. According to Dr. Blumenthal, "Consumers, patients and their caretakers should never feel locked into a single health system because it does not permit or encourage the sharing of information."

Quality Quest is on it. We are mid-way through the process of planning for a Health Information Exchange in central Illinois. Illinois expects to receive nearly \$19 million in federal funding to support the development of HIE. Some of that funding will support the development of a regional HIE for our area.

Quality Quest has joined with other Illinois organizations as part of a grant application to establish Regional IT Extension Centers throughout Illinois. Regional Extension Centers will assist smaller practices, federally qualified health centers, and critical access hospitals implement electronic health records, qualifying them for Medicare/Medicaid incentive payments. Primary care practices with 10 or fewer clinicians and OB practices will be eligible to receive assistance from the center. Our partners include: Illinois Critical Access Hospital Association; Illinois Hospital Association; Illinois Public Health Institute; Illinois State University, Northern Illinois Physicians for Connectivity, Northern Illinois University, Metropolitan Chicago Healthcare Council, and the University of Illinois at Chicago. Awards are expected to be announced in late January 2010. We are hopeful.

Also, ONC (Office of the National Coordinator) issued meaningful use criteria. These are the standards practices and hospitals must meet to receive incentive payments. The criteria get progressively more rigorous over four years. They are currently out for public comment.

I am hopeful that the winds of change will speed our journey to modernize healthcare communications. Quest will be hosting HIT educational programs this spring: April 20 - Champaign; April 21 - Peoria, April 22- Bloomington. Watch for more information to come.

Thank you for all you do to make patient care better and safer. Together, we will transform healthcare.

Respectfully,