



For Immediate Release

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Electronic Health Record Assistance for Central Illinois Medical Practices

(Peoria, IL) – Quality Quest for Health of Illinois has been designated as a Health Information Technology “Regional Extension Center” (REC) satellite office for 38 counties in central Illinois in order to assist smaller primary care practices, federally qualified health centers, and critical access hospitals with the selection and implementation of certified electronic health record (EHR) systems.

As the Regional Extension Center satellite office for central Illinois, Quest will assist small practices by:

- Educating physicians about the benefits of electronic health records;
- Helping them identify certified products that will best meet their needs;
- Connecting them with vendors to install and implement the systems;
- Assisting them in getting those systems up and running.

The center will also help keep physicians up to date on best practices related to issues like clinical decision support, protecting patient confidentiality and best use of electronic health records software.

Quest is part of a consortium of Illinois organizations, led by Northern Illinois University, that will establish four offices in the state as the result of a grant for slightly more than \$7.5 million, spread over two years, from the Department of Health and Human Services. The REC will be headquartered in DeKalb, with regional offices in suburban Chicago, central Illinois, and southern Illinois. The consortium 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, the University of Illinois at Chicago, Southern Illinois Healthcare Foundation, and Quality Quest.

(more)

Creation of the REC is part of a federal effort to quickly implement the use of electronic health records nationwide. The economic stimulus bill passed last fall (the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act) included \$19 billion to facilitate those efforts, including money to establish 70 regional extension centers nationwide.

The goal is to create an electronic medical records system that puts all of a patient's pertinent medical information at the fingertips of any health professional they visit. Doing so will reduce duplication of tests, help flag potential medication interactions, speed decision making and ultimately reduce costs.

"We are thrilled to play a role in advancing this important healthcare initiative," said Quest CEO Dr. Gail Amundson. "We look forward to working with regional practices to help them with their EHR needs."

Physicians will be able to utilize the REC's services at minimal cost. The grant money will cover 90 percent of the expense. Another form of incentive will kick in starting in 2011 when the government will increase Medicare and Medicaid reimbursement rates for physicians who have the systems in place and who meet federal standards for "meaningful use." Eventually, the government will penalize physicians who do not use the systems by decreasing Medicaid and Medicare payments to them.

The REC will work primarily with priority care providers - family practitioners, doctors of internal medicine, pediatricians and obstetricians who serve Medicare /Medicaid patients and other underserved populations. Those physicians provide about 80 percent of the nation's healthcare, but only about 20 percent of them currently utilize electronic health records systems.

The counties covered in the central Illinois REC region include: Adams, Brown, Cass, Champaign, Christian, Coles, DeWitt, Douglas, Edgar, Ford, Fulton, Hancock, Henderson, Iroquois, Knox, Livingston, Logan, Macon, Marshall, Mason, McDonough, McLean, Menard, Mercer, Morgan, Moultrie, Peoria, Piatt, Pike, Sangamon, Schuyler, Scott, Shelby, Stark, Tazewell, Vermillion, Warren, and Woodford.

"As the central Illinois REC satellite office, Quality Quest has the expertise to provide on-site technical assistance, implementation-related project management and practice and workflow redesign services to practices," said Dr. Amundson, who noted that the REC initiative fits well with another project currently underway at Quest. (more)

In June of 2009, the Health Information Exchange (HIE) project was launched with financial backing from the Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services (HFS). HIE refers to the ability to securely share patient medical information (with permission) across different providers and computer systems. More than \$700,000 was issued to Quest to support a 12-month planning process to bring health information exchange to 20 counties in central Illinois.

Quality Quest will begin operation as the central Illinois Regional Extension Center satellite office in March and will work with about 200 providers over two years. For more information about the REC, visit www.qualityquest.org or call 309-282-8820.

About Quality Quest for Health of Illinois

Quality Quest for Health of Illinois is a healthcare collaborative working together to transform healthcare in our state. We bring physicians, hospitals, health plans, employers, patients and families together to focus on creating healthier communities with better patient outcomes. We collect data and report performance information to the medical community and the public. The information helps providers compare their performance to peers and regional/national benchmarks and to improve patient care.

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