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Panhandle-wide electronic medical record moving closer to reality

Over 90,400 panhandle residents will benefit as the Western Nebraska Health Information Exchange Network moves to a panhandle-wide electronic medical record closer to implementation. Within the next two years, the enhanced system of collaborative health care will enable hospitals and providers in 12 Nebraska counties to exchange necessary patient information in real time.

The seven-member network board meets monthly via telephone conference call and in person on a quarterly basis. According to Kim Woods, network administrator, the group serves as the oversight organization for the Electronic Medical Record and is managed by a broader set of stakeholders, including nine panhandle hospitals as well as the Panhandle Public Health District, Region I Behavioral Health and the Panhandle Community Services Center.

Since lab reports, prescription records and hospital discharge information will be included in the database, ensuring patient privacy is crucial to the success of a shared information network. According to Woods, patient privacy is a key consideration as each decision is made to further the process.

The group is currently working to select a software vendor and expects selection and implementation to begin early next year.

Woods is quick to point out that hospitals are not being asked to discard software already in use. "Our solution is not to purchase one software product and expect everyone to adapt it to their needs," she says. "Rather, I imagine the vendor as the hub of a wheel and the individual hospitals as the spokes. Members of the network are working to ensure that the software products fit the needs of each hospital and at the same time, when completed, will seamlessly allow the exchange of information between hospitals and providers."