

Obama Administration Official Visits Rhode Island Community Health Center, Sees Health Information Technology in Action

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Senator Sheldon Whitehouse and Dr. David Blumenthal discuss the electronic health record at Tri-Town Community Action Agency as Dr. Caissa Troutman demonstrates the system.

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[Johnston, Rhode Island] On Monday, March 15th, the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology (HIT) in the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) visited Rhode Island to hear about local efforts to make our health care delivery system more efficient and responsive. Dr. David Blumenthal joined Senator Sheldon Whitehouse at Tri-Town Community Action Agency in Johnston to see how Rhode Island health centers are leading the way in the implementation of HIT systems.

Blumenthal and Whitehouse toured the health center, one of 126 new health center access points funded through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. During the tour, they viewed a demonstration of Tri-Town's electronic health record (EHR). Tri-Town is one of Rhode Island's community health centers that is a part of eCHC, a health center controlled EHR network. In addition, the demonstration showcased a new system function that will allow the direct exchange of clinical information between two health care providers even when each entity has a different EHR system.

Tri-Town implemented its practice management system in September 2008, and its EHR in February 2009. Tri-Town is in the middle of renovating and expanding its examination rooms, and as part of this project is building three dental operatories. Dental services are expected to be offered as of May 2010, and will include an electronic dental record integrated with the EHR.

"Rhode Island's community health centers have helped put our state on the cutting edge of implementing health information technology that improves quality and lower costs," said Senator Whitehouse, who last year spearheaded the effort to create health IT regional extension centers to provide information and technical assistance to doctors who implement this new technology, an effort for which President Obama dedicated \$643 million nationally, for which Rhode Island received a \$6 million grant. Rhode Island additionally received \$5.28 million to promote information exchange capacity within the state and with other states. "I believe our state, and especially our community health centers, can serve as a national model for the ongoing national expansion of health IT, and I look forward to working with Dr. Blumenthal and sharing with him the things we've learned from our efforts here."

"With today's announcement of awards to 16 states and State Designated Entities, all states and eligible territories across the country can now contribute to our common goal of enabling the seamless exchange of information, so that we can give patients the access to care they deserve and expect," stated Dr. David Blumenthal, National Coordinator for Health Information Technology. "Rhode Island is an excellent example of the leadership role that states can play in advancing the development of the exchange capacity of healthcare providers and hospitals within their states and across the nation. Health information exchange will enable eligible healthcare providers to be deemed meaningful users of health IT and receive incentive payments under the Medicare and Medicaid electronic health record (EHR) incentive program."

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Rhode Island's ten community health centers are a critical element in the state's health care landscape. Serving over 112,000 Rhode Islanders annually, the community health centers provide comprehensive, high quality primary and preventive care to some of Rhode Island's most vulnerable populations. The health centers are seeing a dramatic increase in demand for their services during this economic downturn. They are seeing more patients overall, and more uninsured patients. Electronic health records are one tool to help the health centers meet this increased need for health center services.

Electronic medical records improve efficiency and clinical outcomes, aid in quality improvement, and streamline resource management. Jane A. Hayward, President and CEO of the Rhode Island Health Center Association, noted that "Rhode Island's community health centers have been leaders and innovators in the state in the adoption of HIT." Six of Rhode Island's ten community health centers have fully implemented an electronic health record; a seventh utilizes a practice management system and will implement EHR by the end of the year; and an eighth is actively engaged in the procurement process. The remaining two health centers are in the planning and exploration phase of EHR adoption.

Tri-Town Community Action Agency was founded in 1964 as part of President Lyndon Johnson's War On Poverty. Tri-Town has provided health services since 1972, and was a Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC) look-alike until receiving funding as an FQHC new access point last year. As a community action agency, Tri-Town also provides a broad range of social services to our patients within the same facility as the health center.

Founded in 1972, the Rhode Island Health Center Association supports, sustains, and strengthens Rhode Island's community health centers so they can provide high quality, comprehensive health care to the communities they individually serve.

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