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HEALTH CARE: Electronic medical record pioneers come to Ukiah

Redwood MedNet leads in sharing electronic health info, hosts conference

by D. Ashley Verrill
Staff Reporter

UKIAH – The Redwood MedNet nonprofit of Mendocino County will

host a comprehensive electronic medical records-centered conference this summer with presentations by some of the nation's leading pioneers in the field.

The conference, called "Connecting California to Improve Patient Care in 2008," will run all day July 18 and explore the medical industry's difficult digital migration.

"[MedNet] has a real brick-and-mortar approach to the task of making medical records electronic," said Dr. Shaun Grannis, a research scientist for the Regenstrief Institute of Indiana who will speak at the event. "They have actually been a real pioneer in this whole revolution … they should be applauded for taking on this challenge in such a small area."

Redwood MedNet was formed in 2004 with the goal of unrolling an electronic system for rural doctors in the county. Last year, it launched its first pilot program at Healdsburg District Hospital by making lab results available in digital form and usable across facility lines.

"Today, 70 percent of health care takes place in a small practice of five or less doctors, few of which have electronic medical records, and even in Mendocino five is a huge practice," said Will Ross, MedNet project manager. "The problem is that 80 percent of small practices can't afford electronic records, but it's not hard for large enterprises like Kaiser to spin up a project because they have an IT staff. But if those two groups can't share data, it kind of defeats the purpose."

One of the biggest goals of making health information available electronically is having the ability to pull up medical history quickly, no matter where a patient is treated. But today, more than 400 vendors sell different kinds of records software, each without the ability to talk to each other.

"Our goal is to have community-wide adoption," Mr. Ross said. "That's why we are doing this on a service-to-service basis. We have integrated the lab results, and next we plan to move to EKG records."

The group also hopes to use the data as a form of virtual case management that would track chronic-disease care and develop best practices using the results. Plans have also been put in

motion to connect 25 ambulatory practices in Lake and Mendocino counties with a clinical messaging system.

The summer event will be broken into five sections, including privacy and policy, issues on getting the ball rolling, national prospective quality of care, looking forward to an electronic community and the future of medicine: genomic medicine.

The event will feature 13 expert speakers, including Dr. Brian Herrick, professor at the University of California Davis School of Medicine; Dr. Daniel Rosenthal, program director for Health Information Technology, National Quality Forum; and Dr. Michael Stearns of e-MDs Inc. of Austin, Texas.

Currently, California is one of 12 states considered to be in the early stages of electronic medical records implementation, according to the Department of Health and Human Services. Only four states are listed as having fully operational systems, and the rest are either in early planning or have nothing at all.

For more information on the event or to register, visit www.mendocinohre.org.