

\$1.6 Million Grant to Improve Flow of Patient Health Information

Lincoln— The Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), Office of Rural Health received word this week that Nebraska is one of 16 states to receive a Critical Access Hospital, Health Information Technology (HIT) grant. These grants are funded by the federal Health Resources and Services Administration and the amount of the grant is \$1,599,996.

The 18 month grant began September 1, 2007.

The main purpose of the grant is to create an electronic system which will give hospitals and clinics instantly updated patient information. Health care providers can, in turn, make better treatment decisions based on this more up to date patient data.

The grant project will also identify other current initiatives in Nebraska related to the electronic sharing of clinical health information. The purpose of this grant effort is to incorporate lessons learned, reduce any potential duplication of efforts, and support collaboration.

"The activities funded by this grant will serve as a demonstration project for the rest of our state," said Dr. Joann Schaefer, Chief Medical Officer, DHHS. "The entire arena of electronic medical records is high up on DHHS' to-do list. For example LB185, passed this year, allows DHHS to release patient data to health care providers. This is the patient data that Emergency Medical Service (EMS) crews collect and submit for the eNARSIS* data base. This is just one example of how DHHS is moving forward with electronic health record keeping."

In order to develop this electronic system, the grant project will focus on a circle of local health care facilities in Thayer County and surrounding communities in Nebraska and Kansas. This area includes: a 19-bed critical access hospital in Hebron, five rural health clinics, a home health agency, a nursing home and an assisted living facility, several EMS units, a hospital-owned retail pharmacy and an independent retail pharmacy, and a network partner hospital.

The grant will be managed by the DHHS, Division of Public Health, Office of Rural Health.

"The Community of Hebron, their health care facilities and their partner hospital, St. Elizabeth's in Lincoln, will work to create this model," said Dennis Berens, Administrator of the DHHS Office of Rural Health. "They will also work to find ways to sustain the model. We believe patient records can be better coordinated between hospitals, medical staff, and other providers. This, in turn, can improve a patient's health, reduce health care costs, and more efficiently use health resources."