



LOUISIANA
HEALTH CARE
QUALITY FORUM

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ONC RELEASES REPORT ON HIE DISASTER PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE Quality Forum Joins Five Other States in SERCH Study

BATON ROUGE, LA – (Oct. 9, 2012) – The Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology (ONC) and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services have released a report detailing the findings of the Southeast Regional HIT-HIE Collaboration (SERCH) Project, in which the Louisiana Health Care Quality Forum participated.

The SERCH Project was designed to research how health information exchanges can be leveraged to provide timely access to clinical information during times of disaster. Its focus was to build on the lessons learned through major disasters over the years, including the evacuation of more than one million people in the aftermath of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita in 2005.

Nadine Robin, Health Information Technology Program Manager for the Quality Forum, says, “Those natural disasters demonstrated the vulnerability of paper-based health information records and proved the need for electronic health records (EHRs) and a health information exchange through which those records can be accessed. The findings of the SERCH Project illustrate the importance of both.”

Robin adds, “The ultimate goal of health information exchanges is to make patient health information available when and where the patient needs it. This need becomes even more critical during a disaster situation when patients may be relocated away from their physicians, homes and pharmacies.”

The SERCH Project began in November 2010 and included the participation of six states - Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana and Texas – which shared the goal of developing a strategic plan for sharing health information data among the Southeast and Gulf States during and following a declared national disaster.

The report, “Health Information Exchange in Disaster Preparedness and Response,” includes five recommendations to be considered by HIEs in the sharing of electronic health information during a disaster. Those recommendations include:

- Understand the state’s disaster response policies and align with the state agency designated for public health and medical services before a disaster occurs.
- Develop standard procedures approved by relevant public and private stakeholders to share electronic health information across state lines before a disaster occurs.

- Consider enacting the Mutual Aid Memorandum of Understanding to establish a waiver of liability for the release of records when an emergency is declared, and to default state privacy and security laws to existing HIPAA rules in a disaster.
- Assess the state’s availability of public and private health information sources and the ability to electronically share the data using HIEs and other health data-sharing entities.
- Consider a phased approach to establishing interstate electronic health information-sharing capabilities.

The project’s findings indicate that combining disaster planning and HIE functions will help ensure that when a disaster occurs, patients and providers will have better access to information and be able to provide appropriate care.

“The study is designed to help any state plan for whatever disasters may occur. It is more than ‘reading material’ – it gives states a guide for the legal, technical and other important issues that need to be considered in their disaster planning,” says Robin.

Robin notes that in Louisiana, the Louisiana Health Information Technology (LHIT) Resource Center is currently working with more than 40 percent of the state’s health care providers and 27 critical access hospitals and rural health facilities in the transition to EHRs. Those EHRs will, in time, be accessible to health care providers across the state – and eventually, the nation – through the Louisiana Health Information Exchange (LaHIE), she adds.

“LaHIE is working with providers in 49 of the state’s 64 parishes and has pledges of support from more than 50 percent of Louisiana’s acute care hospitals,” she says. “LaHIE’s ability to provide our physicians and hospitals with timely access to their patients’ health records will reduce the likelihood that health care delivery will be decimated by future natural disasters in our state.”

The LHIT Resource Center and LaHIE are initiatives of the Quality Forum.

To read the full report of the SERCH Project, visit www.healthit.gov. To learn more about LHIT Resource Center and LaHIE services, visit www.lhcqf.org.

About the Louisiana Health Care Quality Forum

The Louisiana Health Care Quality Forum is a private, not-for-profit organization, dedicated to advancing evidence-based, collaborative initiatives to improve the health of Louisiana residents. Its focus areas include quality measurement and analytics, clinical quality improvement, the patient-centered medical home/care coordination model, the Louisiana Physician Orders for Scope of Treatment (LaPOST), health information technology (IT) and outreach and education. With regard to health IT, the Quality Forum is the state-designated entity to support health care providers and critical access/rural hospitals as they adopt and meaningfully use electronic health records and to lead the planning and implementation of the state’s health information exchange. For more information, visit www.lhcqf.org.

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