



West Virginia Regional Health Information  
Technology Extension Center

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **West Virginia HIT Center Surpasses Goal By 30 Percent** ***Doctors Getting Electronic Health Record Assistance, Services***

CHARLESTON, W. VA. – Nearly 1,300 primary care providers across West Virginia have joined the West Virginia Regional Health Information Technology Extension Center (WVRHITEC), and this number is about 30 percent better than the center had anticipated. The West Virginia center was charged initially with recruiting 1,000 primary care providers, but thanks to efforts of many organizations the center was able to surpass its original recruitment goal, said Dwayne Edwards, the center’s Director.

By joining the WVRHITEC, the providers receive support and services on adopting and using electronic health record systems in a manner that conforms to new federal “meaningful use” standards. The WVRHITEC was established in early 2010 as part of a new national effort to accelerate the medical community’s use of electronic health records.

Edwards noted that the WVRHITEC’s membership includes not only primary care providers in private practices, but also those who work in free clinics, Federally Qualified Health Centers and critical access hospitals. Other members include providers associated with the state’s medical schools and West Virginia University Hospital. He also pointed out that the vast majority of WVRHITEC’s participating providers serve rural and underserved populations.

“West Virginia again is demonstrating that our state is one of the leading ones in the ongoing digital transformation of our nation’s health care system,” he said. “Programs such as the ones provided by the WVRHITEC are helping health care providers across the state make the switch to electronic health records. It is exciting to see this switch taking place in West Virginia as more and more hospitals, rural health clinics and primary care doctors are adopting and using electronic health record systems.”

One of the WVRHITEC primary objectives is to work with health care providers to aid them in achieving new federal EHR “meaningful use” standards. To achieve this standard, Edwards explained that a primary care provider must be use an certified electronic health record system and 1) capture and store health information in a digital manner, 2) use that information to track key clinical conditions (such as smoking, hypertension, diabetes), 3) share that information for improved care coordination purposes, and 4) initiating the reporting of clinical quality measures and public health information.

He also noted that among the benefits to primary care providers who adopt electronic health records and use them in a meaningful way are:

- **They will know more about their patients.** Information in electronic health records can be used to coordinate and improve the quality of patient care.

- **They can make better decisions.** With more comprehensive information readily and securely available, clinicians will have the information they need about treatments and conditions – even best practices for patient populations –when making treatment decisions.
- **They can save money and reduce costs.** Electronic health records require an initial investment of time and money. But clinicians who have implemented them have reported reductions in the amount of time spent locating paper files, transcribing and spending time on the phone with labs or pharmacies; more accurate coding; and reductions in reporting burden.

“Increasing the use of electronic health records also is part of the federal government’s ultimate strategy that will facilitate the transfer and exchange of patient health information among doctors’ offices, hospitals, clinics and pharmacies,” Edwards added.

The WVRHITEC also has been active supporter and participant in the evolution of a health information exchange through the West Virginia Health Information Network (WVHIN), the state designated HIE entity. The WVRHITEC’s Medical Director, Dr. Sarah Chouinard, also sits on the board of the WVHIN. Edwards pointed out that the WVRHITEC staff members have participated in planning meetings for the upcoming roll-out of the first HIE pilots in the state, and the staff will be working closely with WVRHITEC members as they start to exchange electronic health data via the state’s HIE.

### About the WVRHITEC

The West Virginia Regional Health Information Technology Extension Center (WVRHITEC) was established as part of an American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) program, which is enabling primary care providers across the nation to receive expert assistance and subsidized technical services to help implement electronic health records systems. The West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources (DHHR) played an integral role in facilitating the collaboration and grant application for the WVRHITEC.

The WVRHITEC, which is operating under the West Virginia Health Improvement Institute, is a statewide non-profit organization dedicated to providing education, training and support services to aid the state’s primary care provider community in implementing and using certified health information technology and achieving health improvement outcomes through “meaningful use. The WVRHITEC also is charged with helping to prepare health care providers to be eligible to receive federal Medicare/Medicaid EHR incentive payments, which started last year and will be provided over the next several years.

Many of the providers receiving WVRHITEC support and assistance are doctors, nurse practitioners and physician assistants in primary care settings. This includes providers located mostly in rural and medically underserved areas, community health centers and certain public, not-for-profit or critical access hospitals. The services being provided include assistance in the selection and purchase an electronic health record information system; project management and implementation services; education and training; guidance on privacy and security matters; practice redesign technical assistance; and instruction on how to meet the federal guidance to achieve meaningful use of technology in order to be eligible for the federal financial incentives.

For more information, visit [www.wvrhitec.org](http://www.wvrhitec.org) or call (877) 775-7535 (toll free).

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