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PATIENTS BENEFIT FROM ELECTRONIC HEALTH RECORDS AT VT FEDERALLY QUALIFIED HEALTH CENTERS

MONTPELIER, VT. (NOV 30) – Vermont’s eight Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs) now have operational electronic health records systems, enhancing quality of care for 121,682 Vermonters who receive primary care through the Community Health Centers.



(L-R) Donna Ransmeier, an implementation specialist with Vermont Information Technology Leaders, Inc., congratulates Don Grabowski, Dr. John Matthew, Director, and Lauri Snetsinger, RN, of The Health Center in Plainfield, Vt., on their successful transition to an electronic health record system.

The Health Center in Plainfield activated its electronic records system at the end of October, making it the final Vermont FQHC to convert from paper to computerized patient records. The transition was accomplished with help from [Vermont Information Technology Leaders, Inc.](#) and [Bi-State Primary Care Association](#).

“Patient information is now better organized and easier for health care providers to access using the electronic system,” said Don Grabowski, outreach coordinator at The Health Center. “In particular, it is much easier and faster to run reports that give clinicians feedback on the history of care provided

to their patients.” The electronic reports can let a provider know if the national guidelines for treating diabetes, for instance, have been followed, including all the recommended tests.

In the past, it was a laborious manual process to go through paper charts to review the care patients had received, Grabowski said. “Now I can produce a report in minutes from my computer desktop. It’s practical information that we will use to make sure our patients are getting the best possible care.”

Patients will also benefit by receiving easy-to-understand information about their health, generated by the electronic system, Grabowski said. “This will include a summary of each office visit that the patient can take home to look at later.”

VITL helped every step of the way -- from vendor selection to contract review and implementation -- and made the transition to the electronic record system easier by providing on-site guidance from an

experienced implementation specialist. VITL's staff "understood the logic behind complicated issues"

and was able to share knowledge gained from working with other Vermont health care organizations. In addition, Bi-State Primary Care Association staff helped ensure clinical quality improvement measures, required for meaningful use certification, were being tracked in the collected data.

"With the transition to electronic records completed at all eight FQHCs, Vermont has achieved another milestone using state of the art cost effective and efficient support systems to enhance their provision of quality, accessible and affordable primary and preventive care," said Tess Stack Kuenning, CNS, MS, RN, executive director of the Bi-State Primary Care Association. Bi-State members, including Northern Tier Center for Health, shared templates and staff experiences to save time for the FQHCs that followed them in the implementation process. Bi-State's technical assistance in the areas of data integrity and quality improvement was supported by Grant Number 1 H2LCS18157-01-00 from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Resources.

"Having electronic health records, and being connected to the statewide health information exchange operated by VITL, enables the FQHCs to play a major role in furthering Vermont's health care reform efforts," said John K. Evans, VITL's president and CEO. "One in five Vermonters receives care from an FQHC. With electronic health records, FQHCs are positioned to help coordinate a patient's care with a specialist or hospital, if necessary. The health information exchange process will enable FQHC patients to benefit from the existence of electronic records wherever they may go within the state's health care system."

About VITL

VITL is a non-profit organization that operates the statewide health information exchange, a secure network that enables health care organizations to exchange clinical and administrative health data needed at the point of care, for clinical decision support and to manage population health. VITL also assists Vermont health care providers with the selection and implementation of electronic health records systems and other health information technology.

About Bi-State Primary Care Association

Bi-State Primary Care Association, serving Vermont and New Hampshire, is a nonpartisan, nonprofit 501(c)(3) charitable organization that works with federal, state, and regional health policy organizations, foundations, and payers to develop strategies, policies, and programs that provide and support community-based primary health care services in medically underserved areas.

The Vermont Rural Health Alliance, a program of Bi-State Primary Care Association, is a Health Center Controlled Network. VRHA's member organizations work collaboratively to put state and federal health policy into practice, leveraging shared resources and expertise for common benefit focused on shared missions of access to high quality health care for the medically underserved, including uninsured and underinsured, regardless of ability to pay.