



State of New Hampshire
House of Representatives

July 13, 2009

For Immediate Release

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NEW LAW TO HELP WILL BENEFIT PATIENTS

By Rep. Cindy Rosenwald (D-Nashua)

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Amid so much talk about expanding health insurance, we must not overlook the fact that real health reform also requires cost control and quality improvement. One good avenue to control cost and improve quality is through improved information sharing among providers. Patients whose providers have access to their accurate health information on a timely basis will benefit because doctors will be able to make better clinical decisions. These same patients can also expect less expensive care since there will be less duplication of costly diagnostic imaging, laboratory testing and medical procedures.

The benefit to individuals when their doctors have quick access to accurate medical records is perhaps obvious. After all, many people can't remember the specific dose of a particular medication or the results of a CT scan. An electronic medical record can also prevent serious errors from that old standby: a doctor's terrible handwriting. New electronic health information technology also has population health benefits in addition. This is because the vast amounts of real time clinical health information is a treasure trove for public health researchers. As a nation, we can expect significant, large-scale analysis to yield improved treatment ideas.

This spring the New Hampshire legislature took a major step forward in advancing the adoption of Health Information Exchange among providers. House Bill 542 sets out the strategic framework, starting with principles developed by the Citizen's Health Initiative, to bring about the successful exchange of health information among an individual's doctors, no matter where they are located. The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act includes \$20 billion to promote health information technology and exchange. When Governor Lynch signs HB 542 into law, New Hampshire will be poised to benefit from our share of the incentive.

New Hampshire has a long tradition of respecting individual privacy, and HB 542 contains important privacy protections for patients. It makes clear that the health information may only be used by providers and solely for the purpose of treatment, not for marketing or any other commercial purpose. In addition, HIPAA and all other state and federal privacy laws must apply, and national certification standards must be adhered to. Finally, individuals are able to choose not to have their health information included in an exchange program. While we expect nearly everyone to realize the benefit to having their medical records available quickly in an emergency, we also believe that having an opportunity to say “no thanks” will give the public greater confidence.

House Bill 542 is the product of several years of work by a number of participating stakeholders. It will help the people of New Hampshire move towards real health reform by improving the quality of care and reducing waste.