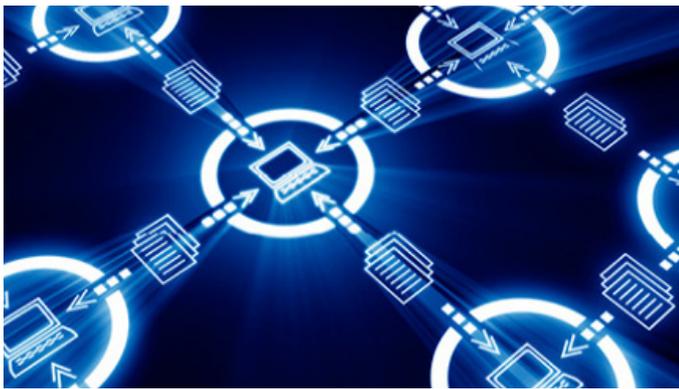


Its Epic house in order, UCH joins statewide health information exchange

Hospital Poised to Take a Go at CORHIO

By Todd Neff

In a move that promises to help patients and providers across Colorado, University of Colorado Hospital [is joining](#) the statewide nonprofit Colorado Regional Health Information Organization (CORHIO) network. Supporters say plugging into CORHIO will help community physicians, laboratories and other care facilities sort through an integrated electronic medical record (EMR) to find exactly what care and diagnoses a UCH patient received. But CORHIO may also challenge a hospital which, like most, still depends on service volume to keep the lights on.



Supporters believe that UCH's joining the state's health information exchange will increase the value of connectivity for all.

Since early in 2013, a team of interface engineers and analysts, Epic application analysts and representatives from the Clinical Laboratory and Pathology have been working on connecting the hospital's Epic EMR with CORHIO, said UCH Information Technology Manager Claudia Lichty, RN. Health Information Management staff and the chief privacy officer for University of Colorado Health have provided key support, she added. The CORHIO connection with UCH will go live at the end of May, she said.

The team will then turn to doing the same with UCHealth's North (Poudre Valley Hospital/Medical Center of the Rockies) and South campuses (Memorial Hospital in Colorado Springs). Both are already linked to CORHIO, but they connect via their existing systems – Meditech in the case of the North Campus and Cerner at Memorial. With their moves to Epic in July (North) and November (South), data destined for CORHIO will pass through a unified UCHealth interface to the CORHIO exchange.

The big picture. Health information exchanges, or HIEs, are part of the federal government's push to unlock patient records from paper files so that, ultimately, updated EMRs are a couple of mouse clicks away anywhere in the country. CORHIO and similar systems ultimately aim to provide seamless access to records of the sort that UCH now enjoys with Epic.

"Anything that happens within our hospital's 50 practices is instantly available to anyone in those practices," said CT Lin, MD, an internal medicine specialist and chief medical information officer at UCH, said of Epic. "This is what we hope to do across the country."

Without HIEs, community providers too often have depended on faxes and patient recall to grasp the diagnoses, procedures and prescriptions given at referring institutions like UCH. A call to a health information management department might not yield a faxed medical record for a week or much longer – the usual turn-around being 30 days, Lin said.

"You're sort of guessing," Lin said. "For emergencies, you can stay on the line and hope someone can run to the basement and read them to you, but that's an hour out of your day."

Continued

Such uncertainty and wait times lead to duplicate testing – new CT scans or blood tests, for example – that impact patients and boost health care costs, he said.

Added Lichty, “We don’t always think of writing an electronic interface of data as patient care, but it most definitely is.”

Network power. CORHIO either includes or will soon include 40 Colorado hospitals, 1,560 office-based providers, 71 long-term and post-acute care facilities, four behavioral health centers and two large medical laboratories. About 80 percent of the region’s hospital beds connect or will connect with CORHIO, and a recent count found more than 2 million patients at CORHIO-affiliated institutions, said Christine Baker, senior marketing communications manager at CORHIO. The addition of UCH is a big deal, she added.

“Patients travel from all over the state to go to University of Colorado Hospital because of the advanced work they’re doing with cancer care and all sorts of research,” Baker said. “When they go back to their hometowns, sometimes it can be a bit rough in the sense that the providers sometimes aren’t sure what happened at University.”

While CORHIO clearly has reached the critical mass it needs to be successful, there’s still work to do, Baker said. Only about 1,500 of the estimated 10,000 to 12,000 physicians in the state have signed up. The addition of UCH, a major referral center, makes “the system more valuable to Denver-area physicians,” and should boost those numbers, she predicted.

Holdout. UCH has been talking with CORHIO for years and always intended to join, said UCHealth Chief Information Officer Steve Hess. The hospital had to get its Epic implementation done first, he said.

For now, the UCH interface with CORHIO will be outbound only, meaning that outside physicians can immediately access data from UCH’s Epic EMR using their own medical-information systems, not the other way around. (Note that Epic’s Care Everywhere feature already enables some data sharing among those institutions running Epic, including Kaiser, Exempla, and Children’s Hospital Colorado.)

Hess said inbound interfaces that allow UCH physicians access to records from outside providers will be built sometime in the future. That will also eliminate the faxes coming in for lab tests done by outside labs and imaging centers, he said.

However, HIE integration is not without its share of controversy, Hess adds. With more efficient information exchange, the technology playing field is leveled with better information integration. That could lead to tests being ordered at external reference labs rather than a UCHealth lab, Hess said. In a health care world still largely driven by volume, that could impact system revenue.

“But UCHealth is very focused on appropriate use, and the assumption is that we aren’t going to be in a fee-for-service world long-term,” he said. “Appropriate information exchange is the right thing to do for the patient and the right thing to do to reduce health care costs and redundancy.”



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Got the Picture?

CORHIO isn't the only thing cooking in statewide medical information sharing.

While CORHIO enables the exchange of interpretations of X-ray, CT, MRI and other medical imagery, it doesn't send the actual image files. The [Colorado Telehealth Network](#) is working to sharpen the picture for everyone.

Within the next couple of years, the network aims to roll out a sort of communal image repository. With this capability in place, images can be shared with the appropriate external providers without the need to send the files to the external provider or burn images onto CDs. The Colorado Telehealth Network will receive the imaging data, store it and make it available to appropriate community providers who have the right to access those images.

As UCHealth CIO Steve Hess describes it, the radiology or other imaging-related interpretation report, accessed via CORHIO, would include a hyperlink to the image or video, making the process seamless. The ultimate aim, Hess said, is to give patients better care, eliminate inefficient image and video transmission processes, and avoid redundant scans that can expose patients to additional radiation and raise health care costs.