San Diego Health Care Leaders Form Partnership, 'Beacon Community'

UC San Diego to lead collaborative effort

May 4, 2010

Kim Edwards

A partnership of San Diego County's health care providers has been named one of only 15 "Beacon Communities" nationwide. On behalf of the San Diego community, UC San Diego Health System received a $15 million grant aimed at improving patient care, safety and efficiency through information technology. The funds are part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) and are being disbursed through the Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology (ONC). Partners include Council of Community Clinics, Family Health Centers of San Diego, The Naval Medical Center- San Diego, Rady Children's Hospital- San Diego, San Diego County Public Health Services, San Diego Fire-Rescue/Medical Services agency, Sharp Healthcare, Scripps Health, and the VA San Diego Health Care System. Principal investigator for the $15 million grant is Ted Chan, MD, medical director of emergency departments at UC San Diego Medical Center, Hillcrest and Thornton Hospital.

"We are excited to lead this collaboration, on behalf our partners in the San Diego health care community," said Tom Jackiewicz, CEO of UC San Diego Health System. "This will allow us to continue to enhance the quality of care, patient safety and cost effectiveness beyond our individual medical centers."

The selected Beacon Communities will use health IT resources within their community as a foundation for bringing doctors, hospitals, community health programs, federal programs and patients together to design new ways of improving quality and efficiency to benefit patients and taxpayers.

Chan cited one example of a UC San Diego Health System initiative currently in place that is already improving patient care and efficiency. The project, called the San Diego Safety Net Health Information Exchange (HIE), allows physicians to make follow-up appointments at participating community clinics for patients being treated in the hospital or emergency department who don't have a physician.

Vice President Joe Biden and Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius announced the grants Tuesday morning. "These pioneering communities are going to lead the way in bringing smarter, lower-cost health care to all Americans through use of electronic health records," said Biden. "Because of their early efforts, doctors across the country will one day be able to coordinate patient care with the stroke of a key or pull up life-saving health information instantly in an emergency - and for the residents of these communities, that future is about to become a reality."

Ed Babakanian, Chief Information Officer for UC San Diego Health System, added, "Our goal is to assemble San Diego community health care providers in order to link advances in information technology - allowing our partners to share methods to improve patient outcomes and safety, while managing costs."

Each Beacon Community has elected specific and measurable improvement goals in each of three vital areas for health systems improvement: quality, cost-efficiency, and population health. The goals vary according to the needs and priorities of each community.

The local monies will be used to develop models in three major areas:

Expanding pre-hospital emergency field care and electronic information transmission to improve outcomes for cardiovascular and cerebrovascular disease
Empowering patients to engage in their own health management through web portal and cellular telephone technology
Improving continuity of care for veterans and military personnel through the Veterans Affairs/Department of Defense Virtual Lifetime Electronic Record initiative

The Beacon projects are expected to initially create dozens of new jobs in each community, paying an average of $70,000 per year for a total of 1,100 jobs up-front, while accelerating development of a nationwide health IT infrastructure that will eventually employ tens of thousands of Americans.

Media Contacts: Kim Edwards or Debra Kain 619-543-6163 kedwards@ucsd.edu or ddkain@ucsd.edu