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MaineGeneral serves key role in establishing health information-sharing network

MaineGeneral Health played a leading role in setting up the health information-sharing network that was launched statewide today.

Maine became the largest state in the nation to have such a collaborative system among leading health care organizations, and the results are expected to improve care for patients and lower costs. Delaware was the first state to do so, but Delaware's system is more limited in scope than what Maine is debuting.

The Maine network, dubbed HealthInfoNet, connects 15 hospitals, three health clinics and the Maine Center for Disease Control in sharing information about previous test results, prescription medications, allergies, past illnesses and surgeries and more.

How can it help patients?

Dr. Scott Kemmerer, medical director at MaineGeneral Medical Center's Department of Emergency Medicine, offered this scenario: A patient who was operated on in Portland, and who resides in Augusta, suddenly develops a complication from the surgery.

If that patient comes to MGMC in Augusta, doctors there will be able to see the operative note and discharge summary from the Portland hospital online "in short order, which will speed care and get right to the problem."

That's just one example. If a Bangor resident with an allergy to a certain medication is involved in an accident in Waterville, and is taken to the emergency department (ED) at MGMC's Thayer campus in Waterville, doctors there will note the allergy and prescribe the best and most appropriate medication.

How can HealthInfoNet help control costs?

One way is by reducing duplicative tests performed on the same patient. Using the same scenario, an ED doctor in Waterville could go online and see results from lab tests recently given to the accident victim from Bangor, thus eliminating the need to order the same test.

Information about mental health diagnoses, substance abuse and HIV status are not disclosed through HealthInfoNet. Also, patients worried about privacy can opt out of the information-sharing network, though a very small percentage has done that so far.

MaineGeneral Health, and its president/CEO, Scott Bullock, played a lead role in getting HealthInfoNet started. Bullock committed \$50,000 to the project in the initial funding stage, provided that MaineGeneral's contribution would be matched by the state's other leading health-care providers. Health care organizations in Portland, Lewiston and Bangor quickly followed suit.

MaineGeneral Health is a leading health care provider in Maine, with 3,800 employees working in 68 facilities across the Kennebec Valley. MaineGeneral is anchored by two in-patient hospitals in Waterville and Augusta. It also operates the Harold Alfond Center for Cancer Care near Interstate 95 in north Augusta.