

# Health data network offers paperless records

## 'There's no more hunting for charts'



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Carla Gaines, interim director of health information management at Tallahassee Memorial HealthCare, checks the records in the giant hospital records room at TMH on Thursday. The Florida Health Data Network, a Tallahassee-based project, will give doctors and other health care providers access to paperless patient records through a cloud-based system they can access remotely.

By Dave Hodges  
Democrat business editor

If a new Tallahassee technology venture has one message for doctors, patients, hospitals and other health care providers, it's that the digital world awaits and there's room for all who are making the transition to electronic medical records.

In Florida, the new health information exchange company HIE Networks LLC will be spreading the word about the potential for more coordinated patient care, better treatment outcomes, increased privacy and gains in efficiency. HIE Networks has created and launched the Florida Health Data Network, a new, secure, cloud-based statewide exchange. It has nearly 1 million Florida patients on file, or about 5 percent of the state's population.

Through the addition of more community health information exchanges, FHIN is expected to increase its records to about 12 percent of the state's population by the second quarter of this year. "We expect that percentage to grow exponentially over the next year and beyond," said Allen Byington, CEO of HIE Networks. Byington and surgeon Dr. Dan Kaelin, HIE Networks' founders, can point to what they accomplished in Leon and surrounding counties through the nonprofit Big Bend Regional Health Information Organization, which developed BigBendHealth.com. It's the largest



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Dr. L. Dan Kaelin, a Tallahassee surgeon and chief medical officer of HIE Networks, is an energetic advocate of paperless records.

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active regional HIE in Florida with millions of records, and it processes more than 600,000 new clinical messages a month.

In Kaelin's own medical practice, gone are the file folders filled with paper documents, lab reports and patient histories.

All that information is computerized and he adds data to it using a tablet he carries.

Another local practice, Tallahassee Primary Care Associates, began the switch to digital files three years ago and has been recognized for its success in adopting the technology.

Training coordinator Suzie Gustafson said the medical office is connected to the BBRHO portal, enabling doctors to exchange records, make referrals and process other information faster and more securely.

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## Records

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Instead of paperwork that was faxed and ran the risk of being lost, misplaced or unnoticed, files are emailed through the secure network. Delivery can be confirmed and a record is maintained of who viewed the information, when and where. Another benefit — “There’s no more hunting for charts,” Gustafson said.

“All of this brings a change in workflow,” she added. “People are creatures of habit and workflows are hard to change.”

Tallahassee Primary Care Associates, which has a total staff of 250, has meetings on the electronic records system each month and tracks how well employees are able to utilize the system.

There’s even a patient portal now where patients can log on, ask their doctor a question, make an appointment or pay a bill.

“It’s been three years now. It took about a year to completely make the switch,” Gustafson said. Each office was brought online separately to smooth the transition.

“You have to have a can-do attitude. It will make or break it,” she said. “It really will.”

### Federal support

It was 2009’s American Recovery & Reinvestment Act that helped build the momentum for electronic records utilization.

The federal government set aside more than \$20 billion for incentives health-care providers could use in their implementation of electronic medical records.

“The last three or four years, the technology has not been the big issue,” said Kaelin, who is HIE Networks’ chief medical officer. “Rather, it’s a cultural change and how electronic medical records can benefit medical practices.”

He and Byington learned

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from developing BBRHIO that systems need to be driven by local users. The regional project used its grant money to find a local IT vendor and develop the infrastructure for the clinical information that becomes the content for the patient’s file. Kaelin said 90 percent of that delivery of care is done locally.

“This has to be a community-oriented and provider-driven network,” he said of the health information exchange. “That’s the most cost-effective model.”

BBRHIO’s success — it was recognized in 2011 as one of the 12 U.S. leaders in electronic records integration by the National eHealth Collaborative — illustrates not only that locally driven framework, but the preservation of the vital relationship between a patient and his or her doctor. That’s the point of origin for medical information, Kaelin said.

“If I create a record, you are trusting me to take care of that record, just like you trust our relationship,” he added.

### Partners

HIE Networks’ Florida Health Data Network has the endorsement of the Florida Hospital Association, the Florida Medical Association

and other provider affiliations. The company is the only endorsed HIE vendor for FHA and FMA.

“The Florida Hospital Association supports local provider-driven health information exchange based on national standards,” said FHA President Bruce Rueben at the launch of FHDN in December. “Hospitals, physicians and other healthcare providers collaborating to leverage health information exchange improve the coordination and quality of care for patients. FHA is pleased to collaborate with HIE Networks and the Florida Medical Association in the expansion of patient-focused health information exchange.”

HIE Networks has a strategic partnership with Uber Operations, another Tallahassee-based company. The two will address the large-scale integration requirements needed to program EMR interfaces of the various providers statewide and beyond.

Byington said Uber Operations’ existing work with the Florida Department of Health and healthcare organizations throughout the nation will help FHDN streamline the process of bringing new providers on board and establishing the

interface they need with the network.

### State efforts

Florida’s Agency for Health Care Administration has a project of its own to help networks function together for information exchange.

In 2010, AHCA entered into a four-year contract with Harris Corp. to implement the statewide health information exchange infrastructure that will improve the delivery and coordination of health care in Florida.

Under this contract, up to 20 health organizations will be brought into the exchange by 2014, the agency said. The Florida HIE is a network of networks, including such entities as large hospital networks, networks of federally qualified health centers, county health departments, integrated delivery networks and regional systems, such as BBRHIO.

“Increased use of health information technology, whether championed by public or private organizations, will yield positive outcomes for Floridians,” said AHCA Secretary Elizabeth Dudek in a statement. “Infrastructure connectivity among Florida’s developing networks and any new system is of paramount importance.”