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Press Release

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Alaska recognized as leader in advancing the use of health information technology

Federal government lauds state's efforts to increase use of health information technology

ANCHORAGE — Alaska officials have been recognized by the federal government as national leaders for their efforts to enhance the safety and quality of health care by embracing the use of health information technology.

Despite the near-universal use of electronic and automated processes across many industries — including banking, shopping, communication, news, and entertainment — America's medical system has remained stuck in the past, with doctors, pharmacies and hospitals often relying upon paper records. As a result, the different health care providers who treat a single patient (primary care physician, cardiologist, and dermatologist, for example) rarely have access to the same medical history, which makes diagnoses and developing treatment plans for that patient more difficult.

Use of paper records can also undermine good coordination of care among a patient and all of his/her care providers since health care officials have to copy and fax or mail needed information to each other.

"The state of Alaska is working to help Alaska's health care providers, hospitals and pharmacies adopt and implement technologies that allow them to communicate securely and electronically, in real time," said Sheetal Shah, HIE Project Officer, the Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology. The Office of the National Coordinator is specifically recognizing the efforts in Alaska because:

- **3,984 health care providers and their office staff are enabled for electronic care summary exchange.** This means that after a patient goes to see her cardiologist, for example, her primary care physician will electronically receive a care summary with details from the appointment. This care summary helps update the patient's file and medical history and creates a complete view of her information for providers, thus ensuring better care coordination.

"We're proud of the work being done to improve care of people throughout Alaska and are thrilled the effort is receiving national recognition," said Paul Cartland, Health Information Technology Coordinator, Alaska Department of Health and Social Services. "Good communication among everyone involved in keeping a person healthy is vital to ensure good outcomes."

Current technologies make it easy and safe for doctors, nurses, pharmacists and others to communicate with each other on their patients' behalf. It results in fewer errors and means health care providers and their staff can spend more time actually talking with their patients, Cartland said. "That's what we're working toward."

The Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology — which has led the process of establishing the essential building blocks to support this secure exchange of health information—is recognizing the early achievements of 22 of 56 U.S. states and territories participating in this effort.

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