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Health record database touted

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Health care providers, patients and state officials gathered at the Fairview Community Center on Tuesday to celebrate the creation of an electronic health record exchange that will link the city's three major health systems, laboratories and primary care practices.

The system, which is expected to launch by spring, will allow local health providers to log on to a password-protected Web site and instantly look up their patients' labs, radiology reports and hospital discharge summaries.

With this data "at their fingertips," doctors will be able to improve the quality and efficiency of the care they provide, N.J. Department of Health and Human Services Commissioner Heather Howard said at the news conference.

That's critical for patients with chronic diseases, who account for 80 percent of all health care spending, Howard said. Until the health care system does a better job of getting those patients what they need to stay healthy, those costs will never get under control, she said.

A handful of health care institutions in New Jersey are working on similar exchanges, but Camden will be the first to connect hospitals that aren't affiliated.

To Al Campanella, chief information officer at Virtua, that makes the city "a microcosm of what is and will be happening around America" as the federal government releases stimulus funding to encourage more health exchanges. "It supports a principle that health care should be delivered at the right time and in the right place," he said.

The Camden Coalition of Healthcare Providers will sign a \$380,000, three-year contract with Phoenix-based Noteworthy Medical Systems to set up the system.

President Paul Ruffin noted that his company has installed similar exchanges all over the world in the past decade. One in Washington State has a database of about 270,000 medical records, which Ruffin said is roughly



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Paul Ruffin, president of Noteworthy Medical Systems, discusses a new citywide electronic health record exchange Tuesday at the Fairview Community Center in Camden.

equivalent to the population in that area. In one year, he said, that network exchanged more than 200,000 referrals, 7 million labs and 100,000 X-rays. “This isn’t an experiment,” he said. “This is something that’s working elsewhere.”

Though the project will benefit all Camden residents, the Coalition is funding most of it through a \$2 million Merck Company Foundation grant aimed at improving diabetes care in the city. The state will also provide \$10,000.