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## **Records database good for patients**

Camden health systems moving in the right direction with electronic records system.

One of the biggest hassles for anyone dealing with a health issue and going to hospitals or new doctors is records. Getting medical records, transferring medical records, it slows down the works and adds another level of inconvenience for both patients and doctors.

In an age where most data is stored electronically and transmitted electronically in a matter of seconds, not days or even hours, it's quite surprising that locating and sending patients' medical records is still a problem. It shouldn't be.

All hospitals these days have computer-based systems for storing patient data. It's just that those systems are accessed only within individual health systems. But when patients get sick, when emergencies happen, when specialists are needed, patients don't necessarily end up at the hospital or doctor they usually see. And their records are needed, often right away.

In Camden, the city's main health care providers -- Our Lady of Lourdes, Cooper and Virtua -- along with Quest and LabCorp, are launching something that should have been in existence for years: a single, Web-based, password-protected electronic records database that will allow physicians to instantly access patient data from other doctors and hospitals.

Kudos to the Camden Coalition of Healthcare Providers and its founder, family physician Jeff Brenner, for jumping through all the hurdles and bringing this data-sharing system to fruition. It is needed and it will very likely save both doctors and patients a lot of time, aggravation and money.

When Brenner sees patients who've been to a hospital, very often they don't remember what tests or procedures were done or what other treatments were provided. Some don't even remember where they were treated or can't communicate it.

"I play 20 questions. It's just a mess. You end up duplicating tests; you end up missing things," Brenner says. Sometimes it takes a week for his office to pull together all the needed records to treat a patient. "It's a major time waste."

The system slated to go online in Camden by the spring should change all that, at least for patients treated solely in the city. Using about \$380,000 from a Merck Company Foundation grant, the coalition will hire a Phoenix firm to create and operate what's called the "health information exchange." The firm, Noteworthy Medical Systems, has installed 20 such exchanges around the country in various regions.

In creating this system, the primary concern must, of course, be security. Protecting the data from hackers and

from unauthorized people getting access is of utmost importance. If this system can be broken into, it cannot be used. But if it is truly secure, then it is absolutely something that should happen.

Doctors waiting hours or even days for medical records when someone is gravely sick or injured is something that simply should not happen in 2009. This data exchange could save lives just by getting information into doctors' hands more quickly.

We applaud Brenner, the coalition, Merck and everyone else who had a hand in this project and we hope the system is up and running in the city as soon as possible.