

Camden gets N.J.'s first health information exchange

By Shankar P.

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While Camden hasn't often projected the picture of health, Gov. Jon S. Corzine on Tuesday morning praised the city, saying "Camden is quickly becoming a model for improving the quality of health care in America's cities."

Prompting Corzine was the announcement of the creation of the Camden Health Information Exchange, which aims to link private doctors, hospital emergency rooms and community health centers, and the city's 79,000 residents.

Funding for the \$380,000 venture has been finalized, and a contract will be signed soon with the vendor of the IT infrastructure for the exchange, said Dr. Jeffrey Brenner, medical director of the Camden Coalition of Healthcare Providers and the project's key driver. The exchange should be functional by late winter or early spring, he said.

Brenner has been a family physician in Camden for the past 11 years, and founded the Camden Coalition of Healthcare Providers eight years ago. The coalition is a citywide organization of social workers, nurses, physicians and administrators, among others.

Brenner said he has worked on the exchange project for the past six months, roping in partners such as Cooper University Hospital, Our Lady of Lourdes Health System and Virtua Health. About a dozen other outpatient medical offices are also among the project's promoters, he said.

It is New Jersey's first such exchange with multiple hospitals and medical centers as partners, according to Brenner. Health care companies like AtlantiCare also have health information exchanges, but they operate within several hospital facilities of the same organization, he said.

The exchange will allow a hospital's emergency department or primary care physician to access a patient's recent lab results, radiology reports and discharge summaries, according to a state health department press release. If a patient recently has been discharged from a hospital, a physician would use that information as part of the patient assessment and treatment plan, the release said.

The health department said it had provided \$10,000 in grant funding for the Camden exchange, and that similar efforts were under way elsewhere in the state.

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