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## **Mississippi Health Care Providers Sign Up for EHRs at Record Pace**

Baton Rouge – Last week, the state of Mississippi achieved a milestone in health care improvement when the 1,000<sup>th</sup> primary care provider took the first step toward adopting an electronic health record (EHR). With this commitment, health care providers in Mississippi are adding EHRs at a pace faster than in all but two other states.

This aggressive move toward digital records places Mississippi in position to become a leader in the ability of physicians, hospitals, clinics and other health care providers to share medical information; thus improving the overall quality of health care.

The commitment to adopt EHRs can be seen in the work of the nation's network of regional extension centers (RECs). These centers were formed about a year ago to hasten the movement toward EHR adoption. The federal Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology created 62 RECs throughout the country to assist a set number of primary care providers in its region.

The Mississippi REC, managed by eQHealth Solutions of Baton Rouge, is charged with assisting 1,000 primary care providers. RECs are funded at three milestones; 1) enrolling primary care providers, 2) assisting providers as they implement an EHR, and 3) helping the provider to achieve "meaningful use" of their EHR (meeting criteria established by the federal government).

With 1,001 enrolled providers, the Mississippi REC is the third in the nations to achieve its enrollment target. REC's in Massachusetts and South Carolina were the first two RECs to reach their enrollment goals.

"The State of Mississippi is making great strides toward developing an electronically-enabled health care system. As the REC for the state, we are proud to have played an important role by supporting clinicians as they transition from paper-based systems," said Gary Curtis, eQHealth Solutions president and chief executive officer.

Prior to beginning work in Mississippi, eQHealth conducted a survey of medical providers. At that time, a very low percentage of providers were using an EHR. Even more challenging was the fact that more than half of the state's medical community did not have any plans to make the transition from paper to digital records.

"Today's announcement is a testament to the dedication of the health care providers throughout Mississippi to make a fundamental change. This demonstrates the commitment to improving the quality and delivery of health care through the implementation of an EHR," said Medgar Austin, Deputy Administrator for Strategic Planning at the Mississippi Division of Medicaid."

EHRs are the foundation for the next improvements in health care quality. According to the Harvard School of Public Health, electronic records enable health care providers to have ready access to vital information about a patient's medical history. These systems aid in the early diagnose of disease, allow for proactive treatments and improves patient overall outcomes. Experts also expect that EHRs will slow or reduce the health care spending by eliminating unnecessary or duplicate tests, reducing errors and improving clinical decision-making.

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