

PHARMACY HEALTH INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY GRANTS FOR CRITICAL ACCESS HOSPITALS

During July, grant funding will be made available from the Department of Health to Florida's eleven critical access hospitals to assist them in purchasing basic pharmacy health information technology equipment needed to prevent errors during the prescribing, transcribing, dispensing, and administration of medications to hospital patients. The grants will allow these hospitals to purchase computerized pharmacy management information systems to verify if the prescribed medication and dosage is appropriate for the patient's condition, automated dispensing cabinets to prevent the wrong medicines from being given to patients when a physician or pharmacist is not present, and computerized infusion pumps to ensure that intravenous fluids are appropriately administered to patients.

Most small rural hospitals lack the resources to obtain and support basic health information technology (HIT) to assist with improving quality of care and patient safety that is available in larger hospitals. A survey of Florida's critical access hospitals found that five of the eleven lack any basic pharmacy HIT needed to prevent medication errors.

The Institute of Medicine's publication, Crossing the Quality Chasm: A New Health System for the 21st Century, reported that health information technology has a major role in improving patient safety.⁽¹⁾ The report quotes various studies that have demonstrated the effect of pharmacy-related health information technology on medication errors. For example, Anderson et al used a computer simulation model to show that implementation of a comprehensive medication delivery system designed to detect and prevent medication errors could save 1,226 days of hospitalization and \$1.4 million annually, even if the system only prevented 26% of medication errors.⁽²⁾

Florida's Office of Rural Health has been working with small rural hospitals over the past four years to assist them with improving medication safety and quality of patient care. This program is one of the activities being conducted to assist critical access hospitals that are funded by a federal grant from the Health Resources and Services Administration. The program is being conducted in cooperation with Florida's Medicare Quality Improvement Organization and the University College of Pharmacy and provides technical assistance and support to eleven critical access hospitals with no more than 25 beds that are located in rural communities. Over the past four years, the program has worked with hospital nursing and pharmacy staff to: establish functioning hospital medication safety committees; establish processes for identifying and reconciling medications that patients are taking when they are admitted to the hospital; implemented screening and immunization for all hospital patients for influenza and pneumococcal disease without requiring a physician order; developed processes, systems, and staff skills for reporting, analyzing and addressing the causes of medication errors; and institute the reporting of medication errors in emergency rooms.

For more information on Florida's medication safety program contact Bob Pannell, critical access hospital coordinator, at 850-245-4444 x2705 or robert_pannell@doh.state.fl.us.

(1) The Institute of Medicine. Crossing the quality chasm: a new health system for the 21st century. Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press, 2004.

(2) Anderson JG, Jay SJ, Anderson M, Hunt TJ. Evaluating the capability of information technology to prevent adverse drug events: a computer simulation approach. *JAMIA* 2002; 9:479-490.