



Helene Nelson

## The Promise of “eHealth”

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Wisconsin’s physicians are motivated to lead the nation in delivering safe, high-quality and efficient health care. The Board on eHealth Care Quality and Patient Safety—which includes 4 physician leaders appointed by the Governor—has proposed a 5-year plan to help achieve this goal through better use of health information technology and health information exchange. The eHealth Plan can save lives, improve the health status of the people of Wisconsin, and achieve a better return on investment in health care.

The Governor has challenged Wisconsin to achieve statewide adoption of electronic health records and the capacity for statewide exchange of critical patient information for purposes of better patient care. The plan lays out recommendations to meet the challenge. However, this is not a plan about an information technology project—it is about improving the health system and thereby the health of all the people of Wisconsin.

Investment in Health Information Technology (HIT) and Health Information Exchange (HIE) will provide the platform for health care

professionals in Wisconsin to meet our mutual goals for excellent patient-centric care. Our focus is consistent with the 6 aims for improvement established by the Institute of Medicine for health care that is safe, effective, patient-centered, timely, efficient, and equitable.

Our core vision is that no patient will ever be harmed by lack of information at the point of patient care. Many physicians in our state have experienced the benefit of electronic medical records and related HIT as a powerful tool to help them improve patient care. As a tool that helps support clinical judgment and practice, HIT can provide physicians with access to a complete medical record for each of their patients and other clinical information. This information will help physicians accomplish their goal to practice the best, evidence-based medicine possible and to do so efficiently.

Working together, we in Wisconsin have an opportunity to transform health care by deploying technology that did not exist just a few years ago. Our fundamental reason for doing so is to achieve better, safer, and more efficient patient care and thereby improve the overall health status of Wisconsin’s population. This technology will also enable us to achieve better value for the money we collectively spend on prevention and treatment services that will improve the state’s economic vitality and competitive position.

Wisconsin is a state uniquely positioned to transform the health care sector through use of statewide HIT and HIE. We have a wonderful opportunity to accelerate ground-breaking work already underway in the state, led largely by health care professionals, including physician groups, and by other private sector leaders such as purchasers, payers, and technology companies. Many large health care systems are already moving ahead with HIT investments. In both health care and technology sectors, we benefit from strong intellectual resources and a commitment to succeed in statewide HIT and HIE. Finally, there is a growing commitment to collaboration among private sector partners, and between state government and the private sector. For example, the Wisconsin Collaborative for Healthcare Quality, the Wisconsin Health Information Organization, the Wisconsin Medical Society, and the Wisconsin Hospital Association are working together to promote quality improvement through appropriately measuring and reporting care quality and costs.

The eHealth Plan seeks to leverage the potential of Wisconsin to lead the nation in achieving a statewide HIT/HIE system. Many volunteers from across the state have participated in a formal planning process to develop this 5-year plan. The plan contains many important recommendations and a year-by-year schedule to achieve the goals set out in the Governor’s Executive Order for statewide elec-

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tronic health data exchange between payers, health care professionals, consumers of health care, researchers, and government agencies in 5 years. It also recognizes the essential role of the consumer/patient, supporting individuals to take responsibility for their own health with a firm assurance and understanding of their privacy rights balanced with the importance of health care professionals' need to share information for effective, safe treatment.

The plan weaves together multiple strategies to take a coherent, whole-systems approach to transformation of the health care sector:

1. Improvement in quality, safety, and value by establishing the technology platform to provide needed information at the point of patient care
2. Value-based health care purchasing
3. Public-private partnerships for population-based prevention

The state will seek to be the best possible partner with physicians, all health care professionals, and other key stakeholders interested in health care system improvement. We will actively engage in collaboration and coordination with related system improvement efforts. Together, we will build on the strengths that exist in Wisconsin and apply the best information available from around the country.

A recent *Health Affairs* article reporting health rankings of the United States compared to other countries notes the importance of a coherent, whole system approach to improving outcomes of care and reducing costs—as has been done to create the Wisconsin plan. “Bringing in effective IT for maximum national gain likely requires a critical mass and whole system approach that spans ambulatory, diagnostic, pharmacy and inpatient settings... The overall picture that emerges is one of missed opportunities and room for improvements. The

findings underscore the importance of policies that take a coherent, whole system approach rather than a fragmented approach to change to address the interaction of access, quality and costs. There is evidence that quality and efficiency can be improved together. Savings can be generated from more efficient use of costly resources, producing the same or better quality at lower resource cost. The challenge is finding systematic ways to achieve net gains and rechannel the savings into investments to improve coverage and the capacity to innovate. The critical importance of improving coordination of care emerges from across multiple indicators.”<sup>1</sup>

The workgroups of the eHealth Board have done extensive research about what to expect from the national government and what to learn from other states engaged in similar planning so as not to reinvent any wheels and to move forward quickly and purposefully. The work being done nationally sets the framework and informs the timing of planned activities in Wisconsin.

In August 2006, the President issued an Executive Order to advance better health care through health information technology. This order addresses interoperability, health care price and quality transparency, and developing and identifying practices that promote high-quality health care, including pay-for-performance programs. The order applies to federal agencies and is intended to serve as a vehicle for collaboration across the federal agencies, state government, the nation's largest employers, and health plans.

Wisconsin's eHealth Action Plan sets out a path for Wisconsin to do the same, consistent with the federal direction and fostering Wisconsin's forward progress. With this plan, the state is poised to pull together existing and developing resources in an organized way to simultaneously tackle connecting systems, measuring qual-

ity and price, establishing incentives for high-quality and efficient health care and linking public and private population-based prevention strategies.

The Wisconsin eHealth Board's vision for 2012 is both compelling and achievable:

1. Improvement in the state's economy and competitive position as the health care sector is transformed and health care investments result in high quality health care.
2. A transformation of the health care sector that creates healthy cooperation and healthy competition among health care professionals with patients, payers, and other partners contributing to better outcomes.
3. Improvement in the health of Wisconsin's population through appropriate prevention, early intervention and treatment.
4. Continuous quality improvement in health care delivery to improve value.
5. Consistent practice of safe, high-quality, and evidence-based medicine as the state builds and leverages health IT.
6. No patient is ever harmed by lack of information at point of patient care.

On behalf of the eHealth Board, we express our appreciation for the leadership of Wisconsin physicians as we commit to achieving improved health care through smart use of health information technology and exchange.

For more information about this initiative, including the full report to the Governor please visit the eHealth Board Web site ([www.ehealthboard.dhfs.wisconsin.gov](http://www.ehealthboard.dhfs.wisconsin.gov)).

## References

1. Schoen C, et al. “US Health System Performance: A National Scorecard,” *Health Affairs*, Web Exclusive. September 20, 2006, w457-475.

# Wisconsin Medical Journal

The mission of the *Wisconsin Medical Journal* is to provide a vehicle for professional communication and continuing education of Wisconsin physicians.

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