



Illinois Rural HealthNet: A Bridge to the Future

Illinois Rural HealthNet (IRHN), funded by a Federal Communications Commission rural pilot grant and the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, provides connectivity between rural health facilities throughout Illinois.

With IRHN and other similar types of transport networks, the state at some point in the very near future will be linked in a way that never would have been imagined five years ago.

The goal is to develop a high-speed broadband network that enjoys the security of a private network in which to share large radiology files and connect healthcare organizations to each other.

IRHN also will serve as a network for the rapid and virtual exchange of health information for patients wherever they may seek care throughout Illinois.

The pilot grant created an opportunity that has assisted IL-HITREC in ensuring that physicians/providers who are adopting electronic health records will not only be able to rapidly receive information, but also to share information between their practices, acute care hospitals, rural health clinics, federally qualified health care centers, and tertiary organizations throughout the state.

This access to the appropriate transport network will positively impact the progress of health information technology throughout Illinois.

“We are indeed fortunate that these building blocks are being put in place which, when finished, will allow dramatically increased speed and connectivity between health care organizations, as well as patients throughout Illinois,” said Roger Holloway, Co-Director of IL-HITREC.

“It also is important to note that as health information exchanges on a regional and state-wide basis continue to develop, it will be necessary to connect to fiber optic networks like the Illinois Rural HealthNet. This will allow shared information between providers who send a patient from McLean to another Illinois community like Mount Vernon, St. Louis, Springfield or Chicago,” he added.

Holloway said the state stands on the precept of dramatically improving access to patient information resulting in improved patient care and diminished duplication of costly health care services. IRHN will provide both patient and provider with the most current health information about a particular patient.

As has been commented, what we know today will pale in comparison to what we know years from now. This has certainly been the case in terms of health information technology in Illinois and its now rapid advance into the future. It will create limitless opportunities for improved access to patients for consultations, rapid access to critical information in emergency situations, and improved outcomes for chronically ill patients throughout the state.