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Idaho doctors getting funds for information technology to assist in rural patient care

IBR STAFF REPORT

More than 40 physician practices, health clinics and hospitals, primarily in small and rural communities throughout the Pacific Northwest, are getting help to improve health care for their patients through information technology.

Certain health care providers throughout Idaho, Alaska, Oregon and Washington have been selected to receive up to \$20,000 from an innovative public-private partnership called the Health Information Collaborative, according to a press release from First Choice Health.

The organization is comprised of First Choice Health, the Washington State Health Care Authority, the Puget Sound Health Alliance and Qualis Health. First Choice Health and the HCA have contributed a million dollars (\$500,000 each) to the awards fund for 2008. Organizational and in-kind services are contributed by the Alliance and Qualis.

This is the fourth year of the awards program that has now distributed about \$3 million to health care providers since 2005.

In Idaho, awards provided exclusively by First Choice Health are going to the following physician practices: Davis Family Medicine, Boise; Idaho Falls Infectious Diseases, Idaho Falls; Ironwood Family Practice, Coeur d'Alene; Meridian Adult Medicine, Meridian; and Shoshone Family Medical Center, Shoshone.

"We are intentionally targeting smaller and more rural physicians' practices for these awards," said First Choice Health President and Chief Executive Officer Ken Hamm, "because we want to be sure that all people – even if they don't live in the region's largest cities – have access to the best health care available."

"The cost of technological innovation is much greater for small physician practices than for large ones because there is less economy of scale," Hamm said.

Health care quality and cost can be adversely affected when medical histories are done piecemeal, according to a press release from First Choice Health. The American health care system is finally starting to use the same type of technology that banks have used for years in ATMs and that most businesses in nearly every other industry use to operate effectively and efficiently.

The health information technology awards are intended to improve health care safety, quality and cost by enabling physicians and other practitioners to instantly and securely access accurate individual patient medical records in addition to looking at aggregated data among all their patients for improved decision-making.

As health care quality comparison reports become more common, physicians and hospitals are adopting technology to help them more consistently provide care that is effective in keeping their patients as healthy as possible.