

Lewiston Tribune, Saturday, Oct. 17, 2009 – by Kathy Hedberg

## Electronic health records loan on ballot for Syringa hospital district

GRANGEVILLE - Syringa General Hospital voters will be asked whether they favor the district going into debt for \$1.5 million to finance the cost of an electronic health records system.

Polls will be open from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. Nov. 3 at the Soltman Center in Grangeville, city halls in Riggins, White Bird and Kooskia and the Elk City Elementary School.

Approval of the loan now, says Hospital Administrator Joe Cladouhos, will allow the hospital to take full advantage of a Medicare grant that would reimburse 93 percent of the upgrade's cost.

"We want to make voters aware that their taxes won't be increased," Cladouhos said. But it's important to start the process of acquiring the electronic system now "because the incentives drop starting next year and we'll lose about \$350,000 a year for every year we don't have it. Then in 2015 the penalties start kicking in and we'll get a little less than our cost" for every year the hospital delays installing the system.

"Down the road it's a possible train wreck if we don't get this."

The Medicare grant is available to critical access hospitals such as Syringa that have 25 beds or fewer and have a large percentage of Medicare patients. Syringa's Medicare census is about 73 percent. The hospital averages between five and 10 patients a day. Idaho law requires the district to get voter permission before going into debt for more than \$100,000.

In 2006 the Bush administration mandated that hospitals switch to an electronic health records system by 2015 that allows medical providers a secure method of keeping track of patient records and procedures. The system will allow the rapid transfer of data including registration and scheduling, lab and x-ray tests, specialist referrals, insurance approval and pharmacy interactions.

Cladouhos said all the hospital's doctors support the project.

"So it is a wonderful opportunity to improve the care here," he said.