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Health Sciences South Carolina Wins \$5.6 Million Grant to Help Physicians Adopt Electronic Health Record Systems, Improve Healthcare Delivery

Funds will establish regional extension center program called CITIA-SC

COLUMBIA, S.C., April 22, 2010 - - Most Americans agree the healthcare system could be better. Experts have identified health information technology as the way to improve healthcare quality and safety while simultaneously holding down costs. Yet the complexities of implementing such technology are a huge barrier for primary care physicians.

Today that barrier was greatly reduced for South Carolina's family practitioners, internists, pediatricians, and other primary care physicians when Health Sciences South Carolina was awarded a \$5.6 million grant by the Federal Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology within the Department of Health and Human Services to help primary care physicians implement electronic health record systems.

Health Sciences South Carolina will use the grant money to establish a regional extension center program called CITIA-SC, short for the Center for Information Technology Implementation Assistance in South Carolina. CITIA-SC will help the state's primary care physicians secure and implement electronic health record systems. This includes training medical and administrative staff on the "meaningful use" of the systems so that the practice and patients get the maximum benefit in terms of improved patient care, safety and efficiency.

The \$5.6 million grant is a highly competitive award made available through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009. South Carolina vied with 49 other states for its "share of the pie," receiving one of the highest amounts per physician in the country. South Carolina's success is the result to a concerted and coordinated statewide effort, according to Health Sciences South Carolina President and CEO Jay Moskowitz.

"We recognized early on South Carolina would have a better chance of securing money for our state if we approached the application as a stakeholder collaborative. Working hand-in-hand with the South Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), a series of seven statewide health information technology summits were hosted between April and November 2009, to receive input from as many

organizations and individuals as possible to develop a single strategy for South Carolina. This collaborative effort is ultimately what won the \$5.6 million for our state,” Moskowitz explains.

The goal of CITIA-SC is to get 1,000 primary care physicians in South Carolina to adopt electronic health records systems and use them in a meaningful way per federal guidelines. Meaningful use, in general, means that the physician is using health information technology to improve the quality and safety of healthcare services, is delivering care in an efficient manner, and is working to reduce health disparities. CITIA-SC will also assist physicians in connecting to state and national health information exchanges.

Commenting on the grant, DHHS Director Emma Forkner said, "CITEA-SC will play a key role in supporting medical professionals throughout the state as they adopt and expand health information technologies in their practices. This effort not only allows healthcare providers to take advantage of federal incentive payments, but it also gives them the tools to deliver more efficient and effective care to their patients."

Important partners in CITIA-SC include the South Carolina Hospital Association, South Carolina Office of Rural Health, South Carolina Office of Research and Statistics, South Carolina Primary Health Care Association, AccessHealth SC, South Carolina Area Health Education Consortium, the Carolinas Center for Medical Excellence, Lakelands Rural Health Network, the South Carolina Technical College System, as well as numerous physicians and health systems. Through the summits, regional meetings and countless one-on-one discussions, the CITIA-SC team was able to listen, learn and create an implementation model based on a collaboration that leverages existing statewide infrastructure.

That, Moskowitz explains, led to a strong grant proposal and plan for South Carolina.

“These are challenging economic times and everyone is competing for the same dollars. That’s not enough; the federal government only recognizes those states with solid plans. South Carolina’s comprehensive strategy for helping its primary care doctors put electronic health record systems in their practices via the regional extension centers is strong and will help us achieve the goals of better, safer, more cost effective care in our state,” Moskowitz explains.

Technical assistance

The federal government has deemed information technology a critical tool for improving the nation's healthcare system. Health Sciences South Carolina, through CITIA-SC, will help accelerate the adoption of health information technology in South Carolina. Technical assistance will be provided to physician practices to select a certified electronic health record product, implement systems and train staff, and help practices observe and comply with applicable legal, regulatory, professional, and ethical requirements to protect the integrity, privacy, and security of patients’ health information.

Commenting on the new program, HSSC Senior Program Manager Todd Thornburg, PhD, says, “The CITIA-SC regional extension center is part of HSSC’s strategic five-year plan. It fulfills our mission to establish information technology that supports healthcare improvement and medical cost effectiveness. It also helps put South Carolina in compliance with national health information technology guidelines and will ultimately lead to a more efficient healthcare system. The program is designed by South Carolinians for South Carolina primary care providers. We think that is important.”

The economic impact

The \$5.6 million grant will have a significant economic impact. Thornburg anticipates approximately 20 jobs will be created to staff the existing infrastructure of CITIA-SC partner organizations. Additionally, there will be opportunities for companies that sell electronic health records systems and other supporting technology. Ultimately, a new class of workers will be needed to staff increasingly technology-driven physician practices.

The \$5.6 million grant to Health Sciences South Carolina is the second multi-million federal grant to South Carolina to improve the state's healthcare system. DHHS recently received a \$9 million grant to support the creation and implementation of a statewide health information exchange. That's nearly \$15 million flowing into South Carolina as a result of key stakeholders working together on a single statewide plan.

Moskowitz says that multi-million dollars grants like these are critical to changing South Carolina fortunes. "Health Sciences South Carolina was formed by our research universities and health systems as a 'rainmaker' to improve the health of our state's economy and its citizens. The Regional Extensive Center grant is proof that we are meeting that expectation."

Companies interested in participating in CITIA-SC's request for vendors should visit www.HealthSciencesSC.org and click on "HSSC's Regional Extension Center" to fill out a vendor form. For information, contact Todd Thornburg at thornbur@mailbox.sc.edu or call 803.544.HSSC (4772). Vendor forms will be accepted through April 17, 2010.

About Health Sciences South Carolina

Established in April 2004, Health Sciences South Carolina (HSSC) is a statewide public-private collaborative of research-intensive universities and major health systems possessing the shared vision of using health sciences research to improve the health, health care and economic wellbeing of South Carolina. HSSC includes Clemson University, the Medical University of South Carolina, the University of South Carolina, Greenville Hospital System University Medical Center, Palmetto Health, Spartanburg Regional Healthcare System, McLeod Health, Self Regional Healthcare and AnMed Health. For more information, visit www.healthsciencessc.org.