Opportunities for Improved Health Service Delivery
Healthcare Commission Ideas for Governor Freudenthal
June 29, 2005

Form a Regional Health Information Organization (RHIO)

1) What is the problem?

- **a)** Wyoming is studying and planning for development of a sustainable, interoperable health care information and communication technology system to support the effective, efficient and secure exchange of health information across the spectrum of medical care stakeholders.
- **b)** There is a limited pool of health information technical staff resources available to support providers in the acquisition, installation and maintenance of such systems.
- **c)** Across the physician and hospital segments, groups are looking to the state of Wyoming for guidance with regard to standards and/or "preferred vendor solutions".
- **d)** There is an expectation that appropriate incentives should be provided (mainly financial) in order to support the cost of implementing and sustaining health information communication technology, particularly among the smaller physician practices across the state.
- **e)** Opportunities exist to develop broad, statewide health information communication technology initiatives, as well as build upon those now focused on information sharing in communities.
- **f)** Moving forward with health information communication technology efforts in the state will require the constant and consistent attention of a central, coordinating organization working with multiple stakeholders to balance and negotiate the sometimes competing interests of stakeholders in an effort to improve the quality of medical care provided throughout Wyoming.[1]

2) Describe your ideas.

- **a)** Wyoming needs to form a Regional Health Information Organization (RHIO) organization to support the regionalization of health information technology and standards, and to tap into grant funds offered by federal agencies and private foundations in anticipation of a national electronic health records network infrastructure.[2]
  - **i)** "RHIO" is the current term of reference for organizations taking on the coordinating role for a variety of health information communication technology initiatives across the country. They are viewed by the Office of the National Health Information Technology (ONCHIT), the federal agency designated by President Bush to coordinate the development of the nationwide health information network, as the vehicle for linking local and regional electronic health record initiatives into the nationwide effort.

3) Who are your partners?

There are many stakeholders currently involved in laying the groundwork for a Wyoming RHIO. Their roles will help transition this recommendation from planning to implementation.

- **a)** Wyoming Health Information Technology Technical Management Subcommittee – Will provide leadership in communicating with and organizing stakeholders.
- **b)** John Snow, Inc. – Will facilitate stakeholder meetings and provide RHIO structural models and organizational materials from other initiatives in the U.S.
- **c)** Wyoming Healthcare Commission – Will provide leadership in communicating with and organizing stakeholders and buy in from the Governor's Office on formation of a RHIO.
- **d)** Wyoming Governor's Office – Will provide support in the public and legislative arenas for the work of the RHIO in Wyoming.
- **e)** Attached is a list of organizations identified as stakeholders who have been invited to a meeting regarding RHIO formation scheduled for July 18, 2005 in Casper.

4) Please provide supporting evidence and data for the proposal.

- **a)** The planning and development of a Wyoming electronic health records network is taking place in the context of a national movement fostering the sharing of health information across organizations in pursuit of improved quality of care, lower costs and increase information

available to inform public health analytics and planning, and more informed decision making by the patient population.

b) Consultant John Snow, Inc. (JSI) conducted a review of national health information communication technology linkages by evaluating more than 50 RHIOs. JSI recommends forming a regional health information organization in its Wyoming Electronic Health Records Study Summary Draft Recommendations issued May 2, 2005, in Casper and disseminated statewide for public comment.

c) The Wyoming Health Information Technology Technical Management Subcommittee and its subgroups have begun working toward formation of a regional health information organization, with support from the Wyoming Healthcare Commission.

5) Funding/Staffing needs.

a) 1 FTE will need to be dedicated to the RHIO to assist with meeting coordination, grant writing and funds management.

i) The FTE could be in the Governor's Office or Wyoming Health Department, or assigned to a Board or Commission but within an executive branch agency (to assure provision of health benefits and other state employee benefits). In addition, highly specialized legal counsel is likely to be needed episodically.

6) Who is better off and how could you measure the improvement?

a) Wyoming's ability to receive federal funding and/or private foundation grants for electronic health records initiatives is predicated on the creation of a multi-stakeholder organization capable of reviewing and advising healthcare providers on electronic health records standards and technology.

7) Could this proposal be included in the Children and Families Initiative?

a) The result should be improved health status for children and adults.

8) Potential drawbacks and political considerations.

a) Resistance to electronic health records

b) The cost of implementing health information technology in small practices and communities

c) The perceived intrusion of "big brother" in medical information sharing

Appendix: Suggested Key Stakeholders

Advocates for consumers
American Association of Retired Persons, Wyoming Chapter
American Civil Liberties Union, Wyoming Chapter
Blue Cross Blue Shield of Wyoming
Blue Envelope Health Fund
Center for Rural Health Research and Education
College of Health Sciences, University of Wyoming
Comprehensive School Health Education (CSHE)/Coordinated School Health Programs
Daniels Fund
Department of Corrections, State of Wyoming
Department of Health, State of Wyoming
Department of Medical Education, University of Wyoming
Department of Veterans Affairs, Regional Office Center, Cheyenne
Employers – 10 largest
Great-West Life & Annuity Insurance Company
Health Policy Planning Team, State of Wyoming Governor's Office
Indian Health Services, Wind River Indian Reservation
Insurance Department, State of Wyoming
McMurry Foundation
Mountain Pacific Quality Health Foundation
Noridian Administrative Services (Medicare Carrier)
Office of the CIO, State of Wyoming
Scott Family Foundation
United Healthcare
WINhealth Partners
WWAMI Medical Education Program
Wyoming Association for Healthcare Quality
Wyoming Association of Physician Assistants
Wyoming Behavioral Institute
Wyoming Board of Medicine
Wyoming Board of Nursing
Wyoming Board of Pharmacy
Wyoming Dental Association
Wyoming Health Council
Wyoming Health Information Managers Association
Wyoming Health Resources Network
Wyoming Health Source
Wyoming Hospital Association (and all member hospitals)
Wyoming Medical Center Foundation

Wyoming Medical Society
Wyoming Nurses Association
Wyoming Department of Health
Wyoming Primary Care Association
Wyoming Protection and Advocacy System
Wyoming Rural Development Council
Wyoming State Bar Association

[1] Wyoming Electronic Health Records Study, Summary Draft Recommendations for Public Comment, JSI, Inc., 5/19/05
[2] Wyoming EHR Study, Summary Draft Recommendations