



District of Columbia
Primary Care Association

Action And Innovation For Health Equity.

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Council of the District of Columbia

PUBLIC OVERSIGHT ROUNDTABLE ON

**The Office of the Chief Technology Officer's
DC-Net Fiber Optic Network**

January 31, 2011

**Committee on Government Operations
and the Environment**

The Honorable Mary M. Cheh, Chairperson

By

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Good afternoon, Chairperson Cheh and distinguished members of the committee. My name is Donna Ramos-Johnson, chief of technology operations for the DC Primary Care Association (DCPCA). DCPCA represents historic, safety net, community-based primary care providers and other key stakeholders who are committed to our mission of creating a health care system in the District of Columbia that allows for everyone to be covered and everyone to be cared for. I am here today to speak about the Office of the Chief Technology Officer's DC-Net Fiber Optic Network.

KNOWLEDGE IS POWER

Shared knowledge is the power to improve health. Until recently, the health care system for District residents has been disjointed. Patients often have to hand-carry their records from one point of service to another. Each encounter with a patient requires clinicians to "start over." Coordination of care has been poor, continuity of care lacking, and the risk of unnecessarily poor health outcomes has been much higher.

The vision of the DC Regional Health Information Organization (DC RHIO) is a collaborative health information exchange system that seeks to improve care quality and cost-effectiveness through access to shared patient information. The DC RHIO is a partnership between DCPCA and the DC government, with key representation from DOH, OCTO, and Department of Health Care Finance. The DC RHIO is supported by the Microsoft Amalga unified intelligence system, which enables the sharing of data among the local hospitals and community-based health centers that are part of this network. Current DC RHIO participating providers include six community health centers (i.e, Bread for the City, Family and Medical Counseling Service, La Clinica del Pueblo, Mary's Center for Maternal and Child Care, So Others Might Eat (SOME) and Whitman-Walker Clinic) and two hospitals (i.e., Medstar Health Georgetown University Hospital and Medstar Health Washington Hospital Center). The DC RHIO's health information exchange system went "live" in March 2010. As of this date, the system houses more than 330,000 unique patient records, 150,000 of which are for patients residing in the District's most underserved neighborhoods.

The DC RHIO initiative was initially funded by a three-year, \$6 million grant from the DC government, and is now approaching completion with the addition of four new participating providers: The George Washington University Hospital, Howard University Hospital, Community

of Hope and Unity Health Care. Over the next few months, the DC RHIO will become the designated State Health Information Exchange for the District of Columbia guided by an HIE Steering Committee and Policy Board comprised of representatives from all segments of the District's health care community. Operating in the capacity of the State HIE, the DC RHIO will continue to grow, with the expectation that, one day soon, all health care providers in the District will be able to have access to, and benefit from, this shared resource of patient clinical information.

Related to this effort, DCPCA leads the eHealth DC initiative. Serving as the District of Columbia's Regional Extension Center (REC), DCPCA will support more than 1,000 health care providers with the adoption and meaningful use of electronic health records (e.g., for e-prescribing, clinical lab reports and documentation of patient care) to improve the quality of health care in D.C. and help eligible providers qualify for incentive payments from the Federal government. In this role, DCPCA will serve as a neutral source for credible EHR and HIT information systems. In addition, DCPCA will support health care providers with direct, individualized, and on-site technical assistance.

DC-Net

DC-Net has a history of delivering cost-effective and reliable broadband services to DC government agencies and the public school system. DC-Net is expanding in size and scope as a result of Federal support in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, as well as through authorization in the DC Fiscal Year 2011 Budget Support Act of 2010 for DC-Net to provide broadband services to non-profits working in health care. This authority provides a new opportunity to offer DC-Net services to community anchors, which include health centers, senior centers, public housing, and libraries, that desperately need to build out their HIT infrastructures to serve District residents better. DC-Net's services are crucial both in offering quality, affordable broadband access for health centers individually and for ensuring HIPAA compliant health information exchange on the District level. DC-Net will offer health centers the capacity for as much as 1 Gbps, through an IT network that will:

- Enable health care providers and patients to share confidential health-related information over a HIPAA-compliant, dedicated service network.

- Improve access to telemedicine, health education and wellness programs, in-home self-monitoring applications and video-based health training.
- Improve access for Web-based programs used by medical and administrative staff, as well as enables EHR management applications for higher quality care.

Cost to Health Centers

A recent (May 2010) review of the infrastructure and costs of telecommunications services for the health centers showed they are being charged top dollar inadequate services. That survey revealed that health centers pay over \$66,500 per month¹, or nearly \$800,000 per year for services that do not meet their needs as they set out to achieve meaningful use. Health centers are often buying any services they can afford, frequently lacking consistent quality and levels of service. As a result, many of our member health centers enthusiastically supported the DC-Net application to the US Department of Commerce for the District of Columbia Government's NTIA Broadband Technology Opportunities Program (BTOP) for the Comprehensive Community Infrastructure (CCI) grant, which intends to deploy new and upgraded state-of-the-art telecommunications infrastructure in underserved neighborhoods within DC.

Need for the RHIO/HIE

Our health centers are paying way too much money for a system that is no longer meeting their needs. For more advanced exchange of health information, Radiologic imaging for example, health centers will need much higher bandwidth and more affordable rates that reflect their essential roles as priority primary care providers and community anchors. The services and overall network infrastructure proposed by DC-Net is precisely the kind of network we need to move forward.

CLOSING

Chairperson Cheh, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to testify at this public oversight roundtable before the Committee on Government Operations and the Environment.

¹ *Bread for the City*: **\$710.66** per month for two bonded T1 services; *Family and Medical Counseling Services*: **\$1,007.68** per month for bonded T1; *La Clinica del Pueblo*: **\$1,343.68** per month through two different vendors; *Mary's Center for Maternal and Child Care, Inc.*: **\$1,000** per month Ethernet Over Copper w/10 MB both up and downstream; *SOME*: **\$1,400** per month w/Covad for T1 and Comcast for Broadband; *Unity Health Care Inc*: **\$60,000** per month for more than 25 service sites; *Whitman-Walker Clinic*: **\$1,022.51** per month for bonded T1 services.

DCPCA remains firm in our commitment to advocate for all District residents. We have worked diligently to make sure all low-income individuals receive the health care they are seeking at the right time, in the right place, and their basic human rights are met with dignity and integrity. As we implement Federal health reform here in the District, bringing providers to meaningful use of health information technology and we build a safer, healthier DC through the exchange of health information, DC-Net offers a crucial opportunity for the District's safety-net health system. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.