



## **Colorado Springs Military Health System**

### **Military Health System enters Colorado's Health Information Exchange**

*The new engagement will be invisible to  
beneficiaries but the benefits may save lives*

By USA MEDDAC-Fort Carson Public Affairs

The recently established Defense Health Agency's Colorado Springs Military Health System has entered the state's health information exchange (HIE) which is a formal way to improve medical information flow between military and civilian providers.

Evans Army Community Hospital and the medical clinics at the United States Air Force Academy, Peterson, and Schriever Air Force bases will be able to share electronic health data with all hospitals in the local Colorado Springs region, all hospitals in the state with greater than 100 inpatient beds, all major laboratories in the state, and more than 460 office-based healthcare providers in El Paso & Teller Counties.

"This partnership will improve care quality and coordination while reducing costs in the TRICARE provider network," said Col. Timothy D. Ballard, the Colorado Springs Military Health System's director. "It will reduce redundant diagnostic exams and labs, eliminate barriers to care for community referrals, reduce the workload on records sections in tracking referral reports, and provides us near real-time visibility of beneficiaries using civilian facilities."

The non-profit, public-private partnership agency providing this capability is the Colorado Regional Health Information Organization. CORHIO has been able to connect 23 disparate types of electronic health record systems and the military health system.

Thirty-five of the top 50 TRICARE network healthcare providers used by Colorado Springs' TRICARE enrolled beneficiaries are participating.

The first phase allows military medical providers to quickly access TRICARE beneficiaries' network clinical results.

“Patients referred to a CORHIO participating civilian provider or facility will have results in the HIE system without requiring a separate fax or follow up phone call,” said Lt. Col. Francisco C. Dominicci, the CSMHS's chief medical information officer. “Results should be available by the time patients return to their military healthcare providers.”

This simplified access to patients' health information will eliminate redundant appointments, opening more military healthcare facilities appointments. Additionally, nurses who currently need to track down clinical results also will be freed to focus more on preventive care.

“Using the HIE system, nurse case managers and Patient Centered Medical Home healthcare teams will be able to follow up more quickly and improve patient interaction,” said Col. Dennis P. LeMaster, commander US Army Medical Department Activity-Fort Carson and Evans Army Community Hospital. “We send many pediatric and adult long-term complicated care patients to Denver hospitals. Having visibility of those records will help case management and primary care manager teams increase the awareness of medical care provided to our beneficiaries, and the quality of follow up and future care.”

The second phase starts when military treatment facilities fully interact with the HIE system. Those same participating community and state-wide providers will have access to TRICARE beneficiaries' community health records, to include demographic information, lab/pathology, radiological and transcribed reports, medical and medication history, immunizations, and past hospitalizations. The system will notify the network

providers that their patient is a TRICARE beneficiary and for the first time, they will be able to access their medical information.

“Having this information readily available to participating providers and medical facilities will improve healthcare for our TRICARE beneficiaries,” said LeMaster. “Without delay, these providers will have each patient’s most complete and up to date medical information available to them, so they can make better informed diagnosis and decisions.”

To protect personal health information, the HIE system operates in a secure environment, only allowing access to providers who have a need to know. All access to a patient’s information is logged and the requestor identified. Monitors review access records to ensure only authorized providers are accessing patients’ information.

“We are confident the HIE security features will protect our beneficiaries’ personal information,” said Dominicci.

HIE systems research by the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality supports what healthcare providers have long known: sharing health records benefits patients by reducing exposure to radiological imaging, reducing unnecessary admissions, and eliminating redundant laboratory tests by up to 49 percent. Other studies reported that emergency department use of HIEs improved access to patient information. This ultimately reduced the number of medical facility admissions and the overall cost of ED visits by an average of \$29 compared to a control group.

“This is a tremendous opportunity...employing an HIE system is a low-cost technological solution to electronic medical record interoperability,” said Ballard. “The HIE will not only improve care delivered to beneficiaries, it will improve community partnerships, simplify our business processes and practices, saving money; it’s a win/win situation for everyone involved.”

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