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AVH launching digital medical records network

The Aspen Valley Hospital (AVH) is transforming the way their medical records are kept, with a paperless network that they promise will make local medical care more efficient and more affordable.

The three-quarter million dollar health information exchange is being paid for through two philanthropic gifts to the Aspen Valley Medical Foundation. Hospital CEO David Ressler said Wednesday that “nearly 100 percent” of local healthcare providers are cooperating with the effort.

It went online this week and nearly all local providers are expected to begin using it this month.

“We see an inherent value in this because it will improve quality of care,” Ressler said.

The network will allow doctors to access medical records from other providers and hospitals in a digital database. Ressler said the system will enable doctors to get more medical information about patients — and quicker — making for precise diagnoses. Because it will eliminate superfluous treatments, like repeating tests that have already been done on patients elsewhere, it will also drive down cost of care, Ressler said.

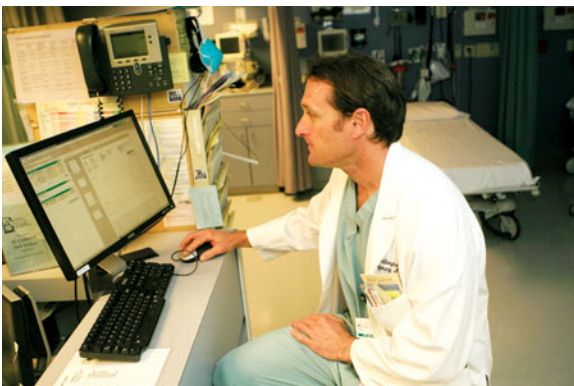
“Using it is only slightly more difficult than e-mail,” said Dick Thompson, CEO of the Grand Junction-based Quality Healthcare Network (QHN), which partnered with AVH to input the system. This summer QHN was featured in a *New Yorker* profile about Junction’s affordable healthcare system.

Hospital officials claim the QHN system is impervious to computer hackers. Thompson and AVH technology chief Dave Bingham said the security and privacy risk of putting people’s medical records in an Internet-like database is minimal because the info is encrypted and because they track who is pulling records.

In the coming years, healthcare officials hope to link similar networks across the country that would enable them to access a patient’s full medical records, no matter where they have been treated or when.

AVH is the latest in a national wave of hospitals to implement digital medical records networks, nudged along by billions of dollars in federal incentives for doing so promised in the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act. Digitizing medical records has also been a specific priority of the Obama administration. Two weeks before his inauguration, President Obama promised: “To improve the quality of our health care while lowering its cost, we will make the immediate investments necessary to ensure that, within five years, all of America’s medical records are computerized.”

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Dr. Gallagher demonstrates a new patient filing system at Aspen Valley Hospital that went live this week. The new system has been pushed by President Obama and should make medical records more easily available for doctors everywhere.