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HEALTH CARE

EHR use cut health care costs, BCBS says

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PROVIDENCE – The use of electronic health records in a three-year pilot program lowered health care costs by an average of between 17 and 33 percent, Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Rhode Island announced Monday.

In addition, EHR use was found to have led to improved quality outcomes, with a 44 percent median rate of improvement in family and children's health, 35 percent in women's care, and 24 percent in internal medicine in Rhode Island.

The results of a three-year pilot program to promote the use of EHRs also laid the groundwork for the launch of patient-center medical homes in Rhode Island by providing physicians with the necessary tools to offer integrated, higher-quality care, officials at Rhode Island's largest health insurer said.

More than 25 percent of the state's primary care physicians currently practice in a patient-centered medical home, supported by EHR systems and onsite nurse case managers, according to Blue Cross officials.

As part of the pilot program, 79 primary care physicians received partial funding to buy an EHR system, along with monthly stipends during the first and second years of the program to compensate for implementation. In addition, participating physicians had the opportunity to earn bonuses based upon on improved preventive care and outcomes for 10 quality measures.

"We have believed for some time that using EHRs makes it easier for us to help members manage chronic conditions," said Dr. Gus Manocchia, senior vice president and chief medical officer at Blue Cross. "A lot of local practices just don't have the resources to implement these types of record systems, which is what prompted us to establish the pilot program." Manocchia said that Blue Cross was grateful that so many local primary care physicians agreed to join in this effort.

"Every provider believes that they deliver excellent care, but it wasn't until we looked at the EHR data that we realized the reality of our profession wasn't meeting the expectation," said Dr. Pablo Rodriguez, board chairman of the Health Care Alliance and CEO of Women's Care Inc. "You can't improve what you don't measure, and while paper is very forgiving, software never forgets. Implementing an EHR brought the entire practice to a level of collective responsibility for the care of our patients that until this time was implied, but never measured."



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