

## **Sawtooth Mountain Clinic to Use Information Technology to Offer Patients Better Care**

Patients seeking care at Sawtooth Mountain Clinic can be confident that doctors can now quickly locate their health records across several regional health care providers—saving critical time in emergencies, ensuring care is based on accurate medical history and saving scarce health care dollars.

Sawtooth Mountain Clinic is participating in HIE-Bridge™, a new Health Information Exchange project that uses a secure Web-based service to allow health care providers to locate patients' medical records at other participating organizations. Initially, 17 health care organizations in the region – including the region's two largest providers, SMDC Health System and St. Luke's – are participating; that number is expected to grow significantly.

Providing the best medical care requires accurate health care records. However, records frequently aren't available for people seeking emergency treatment, those with impaired memories or patients whose records are at several institutions—creating delays while staff members try to track down records by calling various institutions.

HIE-Bridge™ fills a critical need by allowing authorized medical personnel to locate medical records quickly through the secure Web server and to call the appropriate institution(s) and get the information needed for quality care.

Patients who wish to may opt out of the service.

The project was developed by the Community Health Information Collaborative (CHIC), a Duluth-based nonprofit that promotes the use of health information technology to improve health care delivery. HIE-Bridge™ also will provide the telecommunications infrastructure that ultimately could support electronic sharing of patient medical records in a secure environment.

"HIE-Bridge™ puts cutting-edge technology to use for health care providers and the patients they serve," said Cheryl Stephens, executive director of CHIC. "For the last decade, as policymakers have been talking about health information exchange, we have been laying the groundwork to make it a reality."

CHIC nationally received a grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services in May 2008 to help develop and test a nationwide health information network that ultimately will enable health information to follow the consumer, making it available for clinical decision makers across the board, lowering health care costs, reducing medical errors and ultimately improving patient care.

HIE-Bridge™ was developed over the last year with the active involvement of SMDC Health System, St. Luke's, as well as other rural hospitals, clinics and nursing homes. CHIC's region includes 18 counties in northeastern Minnesota that covers 30,000 square miles and is home to 650,000 residents.