

Plan to create electronic health record 'bank' moves forward

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Local officials creating an electronic "bank" for health care records are taking the next step to find out whether their preliminary plan is feasible and how it likely would operate.

Louisville Health Information Exchange Inc., a nonprofit group formed two years ago by representatives of organizations linked to health care interests, selected nonprofit Noblis Inc. as its consultant, according to Judah Thornewill, acting director of the group.

Falls Church, Va.-based Noblis, does scientific, technological and strategic consulting. It will develop a detailed business plan for the proposed health records network.

LOUISVILLE HEALTH INFORMATION EXCHANGE INC.

Formed: 2005

Description: Nonprofit organization formed by the University of Louisville, Louisville-Jefferson County Metro Government and area employers and health care providers to develop a "health record bank" to collect and manage electronic health records for

individuals in the Louisville area.

Acting director: Judah Thornewill, research developer with U of L's Department of Health Management and Systems Sciences in the School of Public Health and Information Sciences

Web site: www.louhie.org

LouHIE officials said they believe the initiative could reduce health care spending by millions of dollars per year. They envision a program that would reduce waste, such as unnecessary paperwork, redundant tests and costly medical treatments resulting from bad interactions from conflicting

drugs prescribed by different physicians. The system would hold records for at least 300,000 people in the Louisville area.

Noblis was selected from among four companies that responded to a request for proposals that was issued in February, said Thornewill, a research developer with the

University of Louisville's Department of Health Management and Systems Sciences in the School of Public Health and Information Sciences.

"We all agree on that shared vision" of the network, said Nancy Galvagni, senior vice president for the Kentucky Hospital Association and a member of the LouHIE board. "We hired a consultant to put the details in place, making sure the appropriate research is done so that we put something together that the entire community sees value in."

Plan to be complete in October

Thornewill likened the proposed system to a bank, explaining that information will be "deposited" and "withdrawn" only by providers who have the permission of individuals enrolled in the program through their employers.

Operating funding is expected to come from employers and other purchasers of health benefits, who would pay about \$2 per month for each person they enroll to cover operating costs.

Noblis will receive \$120,000 for its work, which will include conducting telephone interviews and organizing focus groups. The money was raised from employers, such as Louisville-Jefferson County Metro Government; insurance companies, such as Anthem Blue Cross Blue Shield of Kentucky and Humana Inc.; the Greater Louisville Medical Society; and all of the area's hospitals.

Although the contract with Noblis has not been completed, the company's work is expected to start next month and be completed by the end of October. U of L will provide support from Thornewill's department to help gather information and prepare the plan.

Project could cost \$2 million to \$5 million

LouHIE officials selected Noblis in part because it has experience in strategic- and information-technology planning for health care initiatives, Thornewill said. The company also agreed to provide some of the focus group research free in exchange for being able to use the information to help plan similar networks for other communities.

Louisville would be one of the first communities to implement a comprehensive health records system. Cities such as Indianapolis and Cincinnati have versions that include primarily test results and images.

Officials with Noblis could not be reached for comment prior to Business First's press deadline.

LouHIE officials need the business plan so they can continue their effort to develop the local information network and to help raise the additional capital that is needed to launch the program.

Thornewill estimated that it will cost \$2 million to \$5 million to create the infrastructure and require operating capital of about \$6 million per year. The initial capital could come from a private company that would manage the network.

Another request for proposals could go out as early as November to select a company to operate the network, but officials will make their final determinations about the timing based on Noblis' findings.

"It is evolving as we speak," Thornewill said, adding that he hopes the initial phase will be up and running by mid-2008.

Galvagni said she hopes the study will find that there is a desire in the community for the network so plans can move forward.

"We see the value in it, but it has to be self-sustaining," she said. "There is no federal money to create and manage this. There has to be the desire to have it, and it has to give value to consumers if it is going to happen." |



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