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Critical access, rural hospitals can seek EHR assistance

tnREC received \$480,000 to assist in hospitals in moving from paper-based to EHRs

NASHVILLE — Critical access and rural hospitals in Tennessee can now seek technical assistance from tnREC, the state's regional extension center (REC), to help convert their ambulatory paper-based medical records to certified electronic health record (EHR) technology, according to the U.S Department of Health and Human Services (DHS).

Nearly \$20 million in new technical support assistance funds is available to the nation's 1,655 critical access and rural hospitals. In total, 46 of the nation's 60 RECs received the special funding. RECs will offer technical assistance, guidance, and information on best practices to support and accelerate health care providers' efforts to become meaningful users of certified EHRs under the Medicare and Medicaid incentives programs.

For Tennessee, 42 critical access and rural hospitals are eligible to receive technical support from tnREC, a division of QSource. tnREC received \$480,000 in additional REC funding, but receipt of these funds is subject to hospital sign-up and interest in the additional assistance to the select providers. Technical assistance to critical access and rural hospitals is anticipated to begin in January 2011. Hospitals can contact QSource to determine their eligible and begin applying for assistance via the tnrec.org website beginning in October.

"Hospitals have an expressed the need for assistance in implementing EHR systems and to coordinate this adoption across their community in order to assure care is coordinated," said Jennifer McAnally, tnREC director.

tnREC has been working with physicians statewide since March 2010 to assist in EHR implementation and in achieving the government's meaningful use criteria for incentive payment. Providers may be eligible for incentive payments and reimbursements up to \$44,000 from Medicare or \$63,750 from Medicaid to offset costs associated with implementing an EHR, provided they successfully meet the meaningful use criteria. With this funding tnREC will now offer this assistance to providers within the acute care setting.

"We anticipate working closely with the Tennessee Hospital Association to assist eligible critical access and rural hospitals to implement this program. Our goal is to ensure that every provider eligible for incentives for EHR adoption receives those payments our rural critical access hospital community," McAnally said.

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Over 300 physicians are currently using tnREC's assistance. The company also offers EHR selection assistance, implementation project management and other services in support of meaningful use of EHRs.

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 created a nationwide network of RECs to support the further implementation of health information technology as part of the Health Information Technology Economic and Clinical Health (HITECH) Act. The HITECH Act created the Medicare and Medicaid EHR incentive programs, which will provide incentive payments to eligible professionals and hospitals that adopt and demonstrate meaningful use of certified EHR technology.

Incentives totaling as much as \$27.4 billion over 10 years could be expended under the program, which is administered by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services. In addition, the HITECH Act provided \$2 billion through the Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology (ONC) to support technical assistance, training, and demonstration projects to assist in the nation's transition to EHRs.

For additional information, visit tnREC.org