

## Information Exchange Can Mean Better Health

By Exec. Director of the N.C. Medical Society and Bob Seligson

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**A**s the old adage goes, knowledge is power. We might tweak that to say more complete knowledge may mean better health for you. The more comprehensive and complete the information your doctor has about your health care history — especially in an emergency when you may not be seeing your regular physician — the better they will be able to care for you.

With this in mind, last fall the North Carolina General Assembly created the North Carolina Health Information Exchange Authority (NCHIEA). This new entity will oversee a statewide, secure computer system called a health information exchange (HIE), a private, encrypted network that adheres to all federal and state privacy and security laws. The technology enables any doctor, who participates in the HIE and with whom you have a relationship, to share information electronically and better coordinate your care.

Hospitals, large health care systems and many physician practices already have electronic medical records, but most often the various systems don't 'talk' to each other. This new statewide authority will allow information on your prescriptions, allergies, lab and test results, image reports, conditions, diagnoses, and vaccination history to be securely shared between systems.

When the entire health care team has complete information, there will be fewer repeat tests and procedures, less paperwork, fewer medical errors, and improved patient safety and health outcomes. All of which will result in reduced health care costs over the long term.

The North Carolina Medical Society (NCMS) has long supported an HIE and continues to work closely with the new HIEA to help it reach its full potential. This is especially important now since sharing of such information is key to the success of the state's Medicaid reform initiative. In fact, the legislation requires all physicians who treat Medicaid patients to be connected to the HIE by Feb. 1, 2018.

Much work needs to be done to ensure that doctors, hospitals and health systems are financially and technologically able to tap into the HIE in order to submit and retrieve information on behalf of their patients. Success will mean a healthier bottom line for the Medicaid program and, most importantly, a healthier population.

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