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\$1 Million in Technology Awards Available to Help Doctors Deliver Better Care

(May 17, 2006) Seattle, WA. -- Awards totaling \$1 million will be given to physician clinics and hospitals across Washington state to promote use of electronic medical record systems. Generally, these awards will be given to smaller and rural physician practices and smaller and rural hospitals by the Washington Health Information Collaborative. The awards of up to \$20,000 each will be presented this fall to qualifying applicants. Inquiries and initial Letters of Intent from interested clinics or practices are now being accepted by the Collaborative.

The innovative technology awards are designed to improve the safety and quality of care by allowing health care practitioners to instantly and securely access accurate individual patient medical records, in addition to looking at aggregated data for improved decision-making. Electronic medical records will enable more consistent preventive care and enhanced care for patient populations with diabetes, heart failure, coronary artery disease, and hypertension.

“The use of electronic medical record systems and other information technology has great potential for improving patient safety and the quality of care for patients,” First Choice Health Chief Medical Officer Ze’ev Young said in announcing the second annual award. “But the cost of these systems is too high for some health care providers, especially the smaller and rural ones.”

Enhancing the use of health information technology in physician clinics and hospitals will reduce administrative inefficiency and duplication, while improving the patient experience. “Information technology is used to improve quality and cost-effectiveness in nearly every industry and it is time for health care to catch up,” said Steve Hill, Administrator of the Washington State Health Care Authority. “This award program will provide financial incentives and technical assistance for physician clinics and hospitals to get out of the old fashioned world of paper record keeping.”

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The Collaborative is a public-private partnership of First Choice Health, the Washington State Health Care Authority, Qualis Health and the Puget Sound Health Alliance, with a mission to improve the quality of patient care through the use of information technology. Funding comes from First Choice Health and the Health Care Authority, each of which has dedicated \$500,000 to the 2006 awards program. Qualis Health will provide information technology consulting, quality improvement and other technical support to eligible award recipients. The Puget Sound Health Alliance provides award administration services for the program. “We all expect this program to grow, with additional employers and other purchasers, government agencies and others contributing to the improvement of our state’s health technology infrastructure,” added Young.

Letters of Intent will be accepted from eligible applicants until June 16, 2006. If the Letter of Intent demonstrates a physician practice’s or hospital’s readiness in any of the project areas, the entity will be invited to submit a formal application. The final awards are expected to be announced in September. More information is available at www.WAHealthInfoCollaborative.org.

First Choice Health (www.fchn.com) is a regionally-based hospital and physician owned company that provides health care services to nearly one million members in Washington state and other parts of the Pacific Northwest. The company emphasizes quality health care, public service, and bringing technology to benefit health care practitioners and patients.

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The **Washington State Health Care Authority** (www.hca.wa.gov) is a cabinet level agency that administers health programs and provides access to high-quality health care for more than 500,000 Washington residents, including 316,000 state and local government employees and 128,000 enrollees in Basic Health, a state-subsidized program for low-income families. HCA's mission is to make affordable health care accessible by delivering the best value in health care to all enrollees through efficient procurement strategies and cost-effective health-care delivery systems.

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The **Puget Sound Health Alliance** (www.pugetsoundhealthalliance.org) is a private, non-profit organization—a team effort of those who provide, pay for and use health care services. We all work together to improve the quality of patient care for a healthier community, at a price more people can afford.

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Qualis Health (www.qualishealth.org) is dedicated to improving the quality of healthcare delivery and health outcomes for individuals and populations across the nation. In operation since 1974, the non-profit, healthcare quality improvement organization (QIO) is headquartered in Seattle, Washington and has offices in Alaska, Idaho and California. Qualis Health is contracted by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS).

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