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Funding Available for Technology to Help Doctors and Hospitals Deliver Better Care

Washington Health Information Collaborative Announces Applications for 2009 Grants

SEATTLE, May 6, 2009 — For the fourth consecutive year, the Washington Health Information Collaborative (WHIC), a public-private collaborative based in Seattle, will award grants of up to \$25,000 to clinics and hospitals in Washington state and other parts of the Pacific Northwest. Grants will be made to fund small and rural clinics and hospitals to support greater use of electronic medical records.

First Choice Health is providing \$500,000 for this round of grant awards from the Collaborative. "We are very pleased to continue our support of this important effort to improve patient safety and the quality of care by helping clinics and hospitals implement electronic medical records, patient registries and other information technology," First Choice Health President & CEO Ken Hamm said in announcing the 2009 awards program. Funding from other sources may be added to WHIC in the future, expanding the grant opportunities.

Applications for this round of 2009 technology awards will be accepted from clinics and hospitals throughout Washington, as well as those in Oregon, Idaho, and Alaska. In Washington, applicants who also participate in the collaborative statewide patient-centered medical home initiative jointly sponsored by the Washington State Department of Health and the Washington Academy of Family Physicians will be given preference over other Washington applicants. Inquiries and applications for funding are being accepted now. The deadline for completed applications in Washington is June 10, 2009. The Oregon, Idaho and Alaska deadline is July 31, 2009. For applications, go to www.WaHealthInfoCollaborative.org.

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Across the nation, many clinics are changing how they provide care to patients by creating a “medical home” that emphasizes building strong relationships between each patient and his or her health care team. With a medical home, care that a patient may need from specialists or other health providers is coordinated. A medical home strives to keep patients as healthy as possible. Visits may be planned to keep a chronic illness under control or to make sure prevention or early detection screening and tests are completed.

“The WHIC grants connect two important programs that together can spur significant quality improvement in the region,” said Dr. Jonathan Sugarman, President and CEO of Qualis Health. “Clinics working to change their practices to improve care for patients will now have help to implement and use health information technology to be as effective and efficient as possible.”

The grants are intended to promote enhanced patient safety and quality of care by helping doctors, other health practitioners and critical access hospitals transition away from old-fashioned, inefficient paper recordkeeping. Using electronic medical records and patient registry software benefit patients and providers. “Supporting quality improvement through WHIC grants that enable the use of health information technology dovetails nicely with the Alliance’s *Community Checkup* report which measures and reports on care provided in medical groups in the region,” said Mary McWilliams, executive director of the Puget Sound Health Alliance.

Since 2005, the public-private Collaborative has provided approximately \$3 million to clinics and hospitals to encourage adoption and use of electronic medical records. Interest in promoting health information technology has only increased. “The federal government has identified the promotion of health information technology as an essential aspect of the national recovery bill,” said Steve Hill, administrator of the Washington State Health Care Authority. “The Collaborative is well positioned as a regional leader to work with the federal government on this issue.”

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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. In addition to the 2009 funding provided by First Choice Health, Qualis Health provides technical guidance to eligible award recipients. The Puget Sound Health Alliance and the Washington State Health Care Authority provide consulting and hands-on support for the public-private collaborative.

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, Oregon, Idaho and Alaska. The company emphasizes quality health care, public service, and bringing technology to benefit health care practitioners and patients. **Media Contact:** Dave Endicott – (206) 409-3275 or david@davidendicott.us

Puget Sound Health Alliance (www.pugetsoundhealthalliance.org) is a private, non-profit organization serving five counties in the central Puget Sound region: King, Kitsap, Pierce, Snohomish and Thurston. The Alliance is a collaborative effort of those who provide, pay for, and use health care services, all working together to improve the quality of patient care for a healthier community, at a price more people can afford. *For an Alliance-produced report comparing care in local clinics and hospitals, go to www.WACommunityCheckup.org* **Media Contact:** Diane Giese – (206)448-2570 ext. 117 or diane@pugetsoundhealthalliance.org

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 Idaho, Nebraska, California, South Carolina and Alaska. **Media Contact:** Joyce Shaw – (206) 361-5419 or joyces@qualishealth.org

Washington State Health Care Authority (www.hca.wa.gov) is an independent cabinet level agency. It administers health programs that provide access to high-quality health care for more than 500,000 Washington residents, including 330,000 state and local government employees and 102,000 enrollees in Basic Health, a state-subsidized program for low-income families. **Media Contact:** Dave Wasser – (360) 923-2711 or dave.wasser@hca.wa.gov

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