

Tuesday, August 18, 2009

For Immediate Release

Listowel Wingham Hospitals Alliance joins largest image sharing network in North America

Listowel & Wingham, Ontario -- The days of downloading diagnostic images to CD and sending them with patients, sometimes taped to their chest while in transit from one hospital to the next, are almost over in Southwestern Ontario.

The integration of Listowel Wingham Hospitals Alliance into the Southwestern Ontario Diagnostic Imaging Network (SWODIN) completes the connection of all hospitals in Local Health Integration Network (LHIN) 2. In LHIN 1, Chatham-Kent is complete, Bluewater Health in Sarnia comes online in October and the three hospitals in the Windsor-Essex region will be complete by March 2010.

SWODIN is a revolutionary technology and infrastructure network that allows medical professionals to instantly access, exchange and store patient images such as x-rays, CT scans, ultrasounds, mammograms and MRIs.

Now, radiologists, referring physicians and specialists from nearly 30 hospitals across Southwestern Ontario can view images and diagnostic reports anywhere, anytime. The network is the first of its kind in North America to provide access to a comprehensive record of patient images acquired at multiple facilities from multiple vendor platforms.

“The network enhances local service at rural community hospitals in a very sophisticated way,” says Margret Comack, Chief Executive Officer, Listowel Wingham Hospitals Alliance, noting that the alliance has traditionally operated with a high level of technological advancement and integration.

Comack relates the story of a patient who recently arrived at the Emergency department. Doctors were able to instantly retrieve images from previous radiology procedures performed at multiple hospital sites. At a glance, they could view images simultaneously, understand the patient’s history, and make a faster diagnosis.

In fact, within the first week of Listowel Wingham Hospitals Alliance going live, over 50 per cent of new images added to the network were for patients who had exams performed outside their home hospital. Images that previously had to be transported by CD are now all viewable on the network.

“It is exciting to see this advancement in technology,” said Robert Devitt, interim CEO eHealth Ontario. “eHealth Ontario is proud to provide funding that enables health care providers to harness technology for the benefit of all Ontarians.”

In addition to better patient care, Comack comments that the system makes day-to-day operations much more efficient. Radiologists shared by several hospitals can now spend less time in the car and more time consulting to multiple locations across the region.

“Today’s announcement is about providing residents of Listowel and Wingham with a modernized and efficient health care system through investments in electronic health record systems,” said Richard Alvarez, President and CEO, Canada Health Infoway (*Infoway*).

“Electronic sharing of diagnostic images and reports will help cut costs and enable quicker diagnosis so patients can receive treatment sooner.”

“This leap in integration of diagnostic information has made it much easier for our patients to travel through levels of care across our system without having to repeat diagnostic tests,” agrees Maureen Solecki, President and Chief Executive Officer, Grey Bruce Health Services. Grey Bruce Health Services, South Bruce Grey Health Centre and Hanover and District Hospital were among the first facilities to join SWODIN.

Patients can get consultations from specialists at other facilities much faster because specialists can now share images and discuss treatment plans concurrently. The network brings additional functionality including superior image quality and the ability to zoom in and out on an image.

“This is an exciting time for London and regional hospitals,” says Diane Beattie, Integrated Vice President and Chief Information Officer, London Health Sciences Centre and St. Joseph’s Health Care, London and SWODIN Executive Project Sponsor. “The expansion of this network is helping us deliver more efficient care to our patients.”

About Southwestern Ontario Diagnostic Imaging Network (SWODIN)

SWODIN connects radiologists, referring physicians and specialists across Southwestern Ontario, allowing them to instantly access, exchange and store diagnostic images and reports. Operating since 2004, SWODIN has just reached the milestone of one million sharable exams which includes over 60 million images.

SWODIN is the first network of its kind in North American to provide access to a comprehensive record of patient images acquired at multiple facilities from multiple vendor platforms. Images are housed in a secure facility in southwestern Ontario that is built to handle four million exams per year as the network grows. All data is replicated in a second facility in another location and extensive fail-safe procedures are in place.

SWODIN started with eight locations, including London Health Sciences Centre and St. Joseph's Health Care London and six community hospitals, and has grown to 30 hospitals in LHINs 1 and 2. By August 2011, more than 60 hospitals across LHINs 1 through 4 will be connected.

The SWODIN project acknowledges the support and funding from participating hospitals, eHealth Ontario and Canada Health Infoway that have made this project possible.

eHealth Ontario is a new organization that plays the leading role in harnessing technology and innovation to improve patient care, safety, and access in support of the Ontario government's health strategy. eHealth Ontario published the first ehealth strategy for Ontario in March 2009, which is focused on providing a comprehensive, patient-focused, secure and private electronic system. eHealth Ontario will drive the transformation of Ontario's health care system, building toward an electronic health record for all Ontarians by 2015.

Canada Health Infoway is an independent, not-for-profit organization funded by the federal government. *Infoway* jointly invests with every province and territory to accelerate the development and adoption of electronic health record projects in Canada. Fully respecting patient confidentiality, these secure systems will provide clinicians and patients with the information they need to better support safe care decisions and manage their own health. Accessing this vital information quickly will help foster a more modern and sustainable health care system for all Canadians.

—30—

For more information, contact:

Babette MacRae, Project Director

Southwestern Ontario Diagnostic Imaging Network Project

Tel. 416 580 7287