

Medical records shared online

About 35 hospitals are hooked into the system with 2,445 practices.

By PIET LEVY

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Medical record sharing has entered the digital era in Northwest Indiana.

The Indiana Health Information Exchange (IHIE) — a 4-year-old organization permitting digital access to medical records — has spread from its Indianapolis-origins to a cluster of hospitals in Northwest Indiana.

Saint Anthony Medical Center in Crown Point has been online since November. Saint Anthony Memorial in Michigan City, and the Saint Margaret Mercy hospitals in Hammond and Dyer will be on it within the month.

So now, doctors working at the Crown Point facility don't need a courier to access medical records and test results. Their staff can just log into the system and get the information sent from the lab. For that matter, the documents can be forwarded to the patient's other doctors for their review through the system.

All digitally, all in little time.

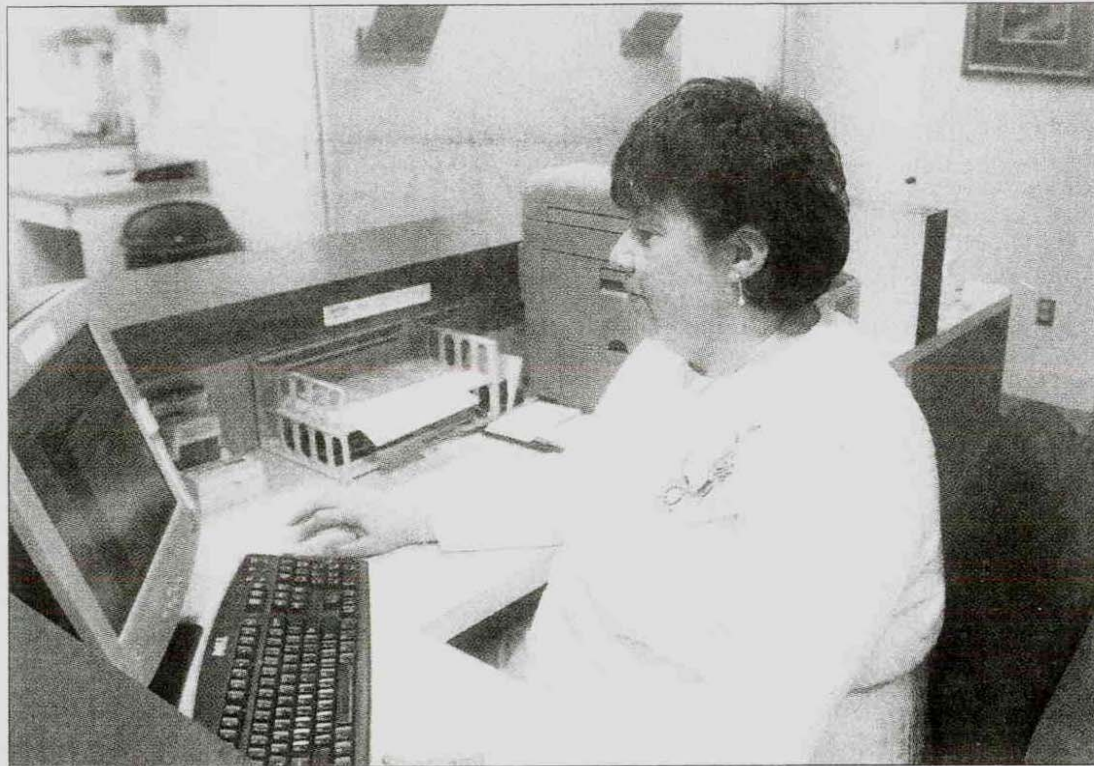
Cheryl Agent, administrator for private practice Cardiac Care Associates in Crown Point, said they'd often have to call a lab for results, and if they couldn't reach anybody or if the lab was already closed, they'd just have to wait until the next day before getting what they needed.

"On IHIE, its right there," she said. "It's an extreme time-saver."

Started in Indianapolis

It took a long time to get to this point, and even still the Health Exchange's primary digital delivery service, DOCS4DOCS, hasn't reached its full potential.

IHIE spokeswoman Jennifer Siminski said the technology's been tinkered with by Regenstrief Institute, an Indianapolis-



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Bea Montano accesses the Indiana Health Information Exchange on Wednesday afternoon at the Cardiac Care Associates office at Saint Anthony Hospital in Crown Point. The system allows patient information to be shared among the state's hospitals.

based health care research organization, for a few decades now.

In 2004 came "the perfect storm," Siminski said, where state officials and hospital groups in Indianapolis came together to expand the concept to a larger marketplace.

The pilot program launched with the Sisters' Indianapolis-area hospitals included in 2006. After all the glitches were sorted out, transferring the technology to the Sisters' hospitals in Northwest Indiana seemed like the next logical step for the health care group.

Nader Eskander, Management Information System Director for Saint Anthony Medical Center, said the hospital is footing all the delivery charges for the service at no expense to the doctors. The same will happen at the other area hospitals.

In terms of security, Eskander said the records are only shared with the appropriate

physicians and labs, with passwords and other security measures in place to ensure records don't get into the wrong hands.

Yet if need be, system administrators are able to retrace keystrokes and see for themselves where records traveled to, who sent them, and when, Siminski said.

Other hospitals to join in

Paul Ciancancelli, clinical business analyst with Saint Anthony Medical Center, said 35 hospitals are hooked into the system, including the three local Saint Francis hospitals yet to go live. That also includes 2,445 practices and over 7,000 physicians.

With each hospital that links up, the database gets bigger and more beneficial. Siminski sees the exchange one day connecting all the hospitals in the state, so if a Gary man has an emergency in Indianapolis, a hospital in Indianapolis can

ascertain his medical records instantly.

The system, for now, best works on the local level, she said.

But other Northwest Indiana hospitals are already in talks about joining the system, or at least are interested in someday being a part of it.

Myllinda Cane, spokeswoman for Community Healthcare System, said Community Hospital in Munster, Saint Mary Medical Center in Hobart and Saint Catherine in East Chicago are planning to participate.

"We are reviewing what needs to be accomplished technically," she said. "We think the program has a lot of merit and advantages for patients and physicians."

Multiple calls made to marketing representatives at physician-owned Hind and Pinnacle hospitals about the program were not returned.

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