

**POSTER SESSION 2 ABSTRACTS**  
12<sup>th</sup> Annual HMO Research Network Conference

May 1-3, 2006 Boston, MA

**Information Technology/Medical Informatics**  
**PS2-50**

**Identifying and Addressing Significant Challenges in Creating a Community-wide Health Information Exchange**

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**Background:** The exchange of health information across organizational boundaries has recently gained increased attention as a means of improving health care quality and efficiency. However, this exchange does not occur without challenges, e.g., legal/privacy, business competition, resource constraints, selecting a focus valued by stakeholders. In October 2004, Lovelace Clinic Foundation initiated the New Mexico Health Information Collaborative, a 3-year project to establish a health information exchange in New Mexico, with support from the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality and community partners. Identifying and developing strategies to address these challenges is critical to a health information exchange's success so has been an early objective of this study.

**Methods:** Qualitative methods are being employed to identify and address barriers to creating the health information exchange (HIE). These methods include: review of publications and materials concerning other HIE projects; conducting community assessments, including key stakeholder interviews; soliciting regular written meeting evaluations from stakeholders; and mid-project formative evaluation using stakeholder surveys by an independent entity. Our study population includes key community stakeholders and data providers, including healthcare organizations, health plans, employers, public schools and other health information technology initiatives in New Mexico and the nation.

**Results:** Our qualitative research has identified key methods to reduce barriers, including: leadership by a neutral, trusted entity; an inclusive governance structure that facilitates broad community input; selection of an early feasible focus valued by key stakeholders; development of timely, short-term products/services to build credibility; use of varied communication and marketing mechanisms tailored to specific audiences; nurturing of strategic project champions and early adopters; demonstration of the value proposition/business case for stakeholders; plan for a sustainable business model from the outset; and hiring of an attorney with relevant privacy expertise. Our implementation of these approaches is still a work in progress. The stakeholder survey is in process; results will be presented.

**Conclusions:** Although a community may agree conceptually on the importance of an HIE, the development and implementation of an operational exchange requires identification and adroit navigation of many community minefields.