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HHS gives millions to bring partnership agenda to Pa., N.J.

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The Department of Health and Human Services awarded \$7 million to a New Jersey hospital organization and another \$5.2 million to a Pennsylvania hospital group to bring the agency's "Partnership for Patients" initiative to medical centers in both states.

The HHS program is designed to improve the quality, safety and affordability of health care in the United States.

The federal agency in December awarded a total of \$218 million to 26 state, regional, national, or hospital system organizations. Launched in April 2011, the Partnership for Patients initiative now has more than 6,500 partners, including more than 3,100 hospitals, 2,345 physician, nurse, and other clinical providers and organizations, 892 consumers and consumer groups, and 256 employers and unions.



Betsy Ryan.

"At some point in our lives many of us are going to need hospital care and we need to be confident that no matter where we live, we're going to get the best care in the world," said HHS Secretary Kathleen Sebelius, in a statement. "The Partnership for Patients is helping the nation's finest health systems share their knowledge and resources to make sure every hospital knows how to provide all of its patients with the highest quality care."

In New Jersey, the Health Research and Educational Trust of New Jersey, a nonprofit affiliate of the New Jersey Hospital Association, received a two-year hospital engagement contract from CMS that includes the possibility of a third-year extension.

"This is a tremendous boost for New Jersey's hospitals and the patients who depend on us for quality and affordable health care" said NJHA President and CEO Betsy Ryan. "It will provide resources, support and a solid statewide framework to tackle some of the obstacles in our health-care system that make it difficult to provide the best care in the most efficient, affordable way."

Ryan said the NJHA's proposal focuses on improving organizational and system efficiency at hospitals as a first step to quality improvement in areas such as adverse drug events, hospital-acquired infections, injuries from falls and preventable readmissions.

The association plans to work with the Institute for Healthcare Optimization — an independent nonprofit organization based in Newton, Mass. — to provide hospital members with "flow management" methodologies designed to reduce health-care professionals' stress, improve hospital operational efficiency and quality, and reduce costs.

NJHA's effort will be led by Aline Holmes, senior vice president of clinical affairs and director of the NJHA Institute for Quality and Patient Safety, and Firoozeh Vali, vice president of research for the Health Research and Educational Trust.

Holmes said while the initiative's focus will be on hospitals' internal operations, the ultimate goal is patient-centered.

"Better care, more satisfied patients and improved health-care outcomes that lead to a healthier New Jersey," Holmes said. "We can't wait to get started."

The Hospital & Healthsystem Association of Pennsylvania was awarded \$5.2 million under a two-year hospital engagement contract that will include 104 hospitals across the state.

HAP plans to work with the Pennsylvania Patient Safety Authority, The Health Care Improvement Foundation, Quality Insights of Pennsylvania, and the Pennsylvania Health Care Quality Alliance to implement strategies to reduce preventable hospital-acquired conditions, readmissions, and complications during hospitalizations.

Carolyn F. Scanlan, the president and CEO of HAP, noted Pennsylvania has been involved in many notable “firsts” associated with patient safety initiatives. Pennsylvania, she said, was the first state to create a patient safety organization (the Pennsylvania Patient Safety Authority), the first state to require the reporting of all health care-associated infections and to release the first hospital-specific infection report. In addition, she said, Pennsylvania was the first state to develop and implement a payment policy with the state’s Medicaid program that reduces payments to hospitals should a covered patient experience a preventable, serious adverse event.

“Pennsylvania’s hospitals have been leaders in health-care quality and patient-safety initiatives for decades,” Scanlan said. “We are excited by this opportunity to build on our successes and engage Pennsylvania’s hospitals in this new initiative to further improve the care provided to the millions of patients who come through our doors each year.”

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