Health Information Exchange Laboratory Launches at The University of Texas at Austin

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AUSTIN, Texas —

The University of Texas at Austin formally launches its Health Information Exchange (HIE) laboratory this week. This laboratory simulates the national, state and local networks that are being developed to electronically exchange medical data.

By providing physicians and hospitals with rapid, often immediate electronic access to medical information, HIEs improve the quality, safety and cost effectiveness of health care delivery. National and state health information technology organizations agree that accurate and immediate access to health information ensures that patients receive the right care from the right health care providers at the right time.

The laboratory is part of the university's pioneering Health IT program offering a certificate program designed to "fast track" university graduates into the rapidly evolving field of health IT.

The HIE laboratory, funded by the Longhorn Innovation Fund for Technology, is a collaboration between the university's Health IT program and two major corporate HIE software vendors, Informatics Corporation of America (ICA) and Orion Health, together with two leading electronic health record companies, eClinicalWorks and e-MDs. By creating a simulated "Central Texas Regional HIE" and "North Texas Regional HIE" comprising virtual medical practices in four Texas cities using cloud computing, this laboratory models the "network of networks" designed by the Texas Health Services Authority for the State of Texas.

"This laboratory provides a unique learning experience for our students by closely simulating the actual flow of medical data between health care constituents in the real world," said Dr. Leanne Field, director of the nine-week Health IT certificate program. "This level of hands-on training for students was identified as crucial by our health care partners that are seeking skilled, qualified Health IT professionals in the workforce. In addition, the HIE laboratory has the potential to be a valuable resource for standards-based interoperability testing and research."

Students in the Health IT certificate program have performed numerous tests in the HIE laboratory.

"Since I am a very hands-on person, I really enjoyed working in the UT HIE laboratory," said Angela Roberts, a fall 2012 Health IT program graduate. "I was able to see concepts we learned in class come to life in a real-world setting. I learned first-hand about breaking the privacy seal, using the electronic health record (EHR) to opt-in a patient, creating a Continuity of Care Document (CCD), and ultimately merging the test patient's records together from eClinicalWorks and eMDs. It was an invaluable experience."