

# Healthcare IT News

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THE NEWS SOURCE FOR HEALTHCARE INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY ■ MARCH 2008

## himss Insider

### 'Smashing success'

More than 28,400 attendees and 900 exhibitors made HIMSS08 a record-breaking event. PAGE 23

## NEWS

### No. 1 e-prescribing

Guess which state is No. 1 in e-prescribing for the second year in a row? PAGE 3

### 'Quite bright'

The head of the panel developing standards for healthcare IT is positively enthusiastic. PAGE 4

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The heart surgeon and former Senate Majority Leader considers how IT is likely to change healthcare. PAGE 9

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Cleveland Clinic teams up with Google on model for personal health record. PAGE 11

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### Poised for P4P

HHS is ready to pick physician practices for its P4P demo. Officials were in Maine to make the pitch. PAGE 17

## Telehealth boon for Ohio babies

Neonatologists collaborate in real-time with pediatricians across the state.

BY RICHARD PIZZL, Associate Editor

COLUMBUS, OH – An innovative telemedicine project in central Ohio plans to extend its reach, using high definition videoconferencing technology to connect remote medical facilities in the state with one of the nation's leading children's hospitals.

The Division of Neonatology at Nationwide Children's Hospital in Columbus is the largest in the United States, treating more than 2,100 babies per year. But until recently, infants outside the greater Columbus area did not have easy access to the skills of specialists at Nationwide Children's.

That changed in March 2007, when Nationwide Children's partnered with the Columbus-based Ohio Supercomputer Center to link the hospital's neonatology experts with pediatricians at Adena Health System in Chillicothe, Ohio. All parties involved view the resulting project as a success, and want to expand it.

"The project was funded with federal dollars, and

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John Radford, MD, attending physician at Adena Regional Medical Center in Chillicothe, Ohio, consults with neonatologists at Nationwide Children's Hospital in Columbus, Ohio, via high-definition videoconferencing, perhaps saving the newborn an unnecessary transfer to the hospital in Columbus.

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John Radford, MD, a physician at Adena Regional Medical Center in Ohio, engages with one of the newborn babies who will be examined remotely by neonatologists at Nationwide Children's Hospital in Columbus, Ohio. The telehealth initiative is funded with federal money.



## TELEHEALTH

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focused initially only on Adena," said Steven Welty, MD, chief of neonatology at Nationwide Children's.

"But the feedback has been universally positive, so we have picked three more hospitals that we're going to connect with, according to greatest need," he added. "We'd eventually like to service the entire southeastern part of Ohio and into West Virginia."

The telemedicine project currently enables neonatologists at Nationwide Children's to collaborate in real-time with pediatricians at Adena Health. The videoconferencing technology makes it possible for the neonatologists to assess and diagnose infants, review CT scans and X-rays, and consult with Adena pediatricians on treatment plans.

Almost as important, the telemedicine program saves time and money, said John Fortney, MD, medical director at Adena Health.

Prior to the introduction of videoconferencing technology, pediatricians at Adena consulted with the Columbus-based neonatologists via telephone. Unable to see the patients and offer a thorough assessment, the neonatologists "played it safe" and had many infants transported to Nationwide Children's. Many of these transfers were later found to be unnecessary.

"Telemedicine has changed everything," said Fortney. "Our transfer rate is about half of what it used to be. The patient and the parents are being better served."

No parents want to be separated from their baby so shortly after birth, so the technology is a good community service."

The HD technology used in the program relies on a dedicated 1,600-mile high-speed, fiber-optic network maintained by the Ohio Supercomputer Center. The network serves as the "backbone" for almost 100 educational institutions in Ohio, and OSC claims that it is the most advanced network of its kind in the United States.

"The major expenses involved in this project were the videoconferencing equipment, the high-bandwidth connections, and the expertise needed to configure the networks," said Stan Ahalt, OSC's executive director. "But you're freeing up time not transporting sick children to another hospital, and you're also building up a network of people as well as a network of technology. When doctors use this link effectively, they build professional relationships."

Ahalt said the impediments to building similar telemedicine programs across the United States are not predominantly technological.

"You've got to have a clearly defined objective, and then get the key technology in the hands of passionate people," Ahalt said. "Broadband networks can have lots of profound effects in different areas of our society than we can see right now." ■



Steven Welty, MD



Stan Ahalt

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