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Top U.S. Official Gets Close-Up Look at Leading-Edge Technology at New Britain General Hospital

New Britain [March 23, 2006] – The nation’s first health information technology coordinator toured the Emergency Department at New Britain General Hospital today get a close look at an advanced electronic system that promotes patient safety.

David J. Brailer, MD, PhD, appointed by President Bush in 2004, came to the hospital with Congresswoman Nancy Johnson. Both are leaders in the national initiative promoting health information technologies. New Britain General Hospital is also a leader in this area, putting advanced technologies into practice to improve patient care.

Jeffrey Finkelstein, MD, chief of the emergency department, gave the dignitaries a close-up look at the new EmpowerER system which came online in December 2005. The \$1 million system runs primarily off 35 computer work stations located throughout the emergency department, which sees more than 60,000 patients per year.

The system also features large plasma screens, which replaced the old white board, to display the current cases in the unit at any one time.

EmpowerER saves time, cuts down on paperwork, and reduces the potential for errors by making huge amounts of data instantly accessible to physicians and other caregivers. A patient’s personal health information, from blood type to allergies to diseases, goes into his record. Also included are standing orders for specific conditions, prescription information, treatment details, and disease treatment guidelines. Patients benefit, through increased accuracy, speed, and the system’s many built-in safeguards

Dr. Brailer said he was especially impressed by the system because it was designed

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by clinicians. “The people who use it, designed it,” he said. .

One of the major public concerns about electronic medical systems is security, but Brailer said such systems offer more safeguards than paper records. “Nothing is fool proof, but an electronic system is far more secure.”

Aside from daily efficiencies, electronic systems provide security in the face of catastrophic events. During hurricane Katrina, thousands of medical records were destroyed that can never be replaced, and compounding the disaster, many New Orleans residents dispersed.

Congresswoman Johnson (R-CT), as a Senior Member of the House Ways and Means Committee and chair of its health subcommittee, has a keen interest of moving toward using technology to manage all health information. President Bush has set a goal of having fully electronic medical records for most Americans by 2014, a goal which Hospital President Laurence A. Tanner has said he is committed to meeting.

Johnson said that she had been in the New Britain ED twice in the last several months and could see the difference in the efficiencies that the system provides. “This system enables improvements in the quality of care that you’re able to provide; it is faster, more accurate, and eliminates the potential for error.

New Britain General is also a key member of “EHealth Connecticut,” which held its inaugural summit earlier that day in Farmington.

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