MU will help clinics switch to electronic health data

By JANESE HEAVIN
THE COLUMBIA TRIBUNE
06/01/2010

COLUMBIA, Mo. — Switching from paper records to an electronic medical records system in rural Missouri clinics and hospitals should be easier in the coming years thanks to a new center opening on the University of Missouri campus.

MU has been awarded $6.8 million in federal funding to create the Missouri Health Information Technology Assistance Center. The money comes from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology.
"This is a big step forward for Missouri and health information technology," Judy Baker, regional director for the U.S. Department of Health, said during an announcement ceremony Friday at MU’s Reynolds Alumni Center.

The department is investing money in electronic records “because we believe it will cut costs, eliminate paperwork and help health care providers deliver better care.”

The center is expected to help 3,200 primary-care providers across the state better understand electronic health records, said Grant Savage, chairman of the MU School of Medicine’s Department of Health Management and Informatics and principal investigator for the project. The grant earmarks $1 million for two years of outreach and education programs.

The bulk of the grant, $5.8 million, will be used to supply 1,200 providers the money to implement electronic health record systems and use them in ways deemed meaningful by Medicare and Medicaid offices. Clinics and hospitals also will be able to apply for low-interest loans through the center.

The assistance center also will help doctors select electronic health care record vendors.

“The center will help to inform and educate them about the different pros and cons of various electronic health records and help them make sure when they enter into contract, that it has all of the necessary pieces,” Savage said. “We will work with providers to figure out how they want to make it work as efficiently and effectively as possible for them so they’re not being bogged down by the adoption of electronic health records in the first place.”

The new center is not part of Tiger Institute — the partnership between the university and Cerner, a Kansas City health records corporation — but there are obvious overlaps. The Missouri HIT Assistance Center will help doctors select record system vendors, and in some cases Cerner products might be the best option for a provider. Savage said the center will not recommend or favor any one vendor and Cerner would have to competitively bid just like any other business.

The assistance center will help physicians implement new technologies while the Tiger Institute works to create new medical technologies. Hal Williamson, vice chancellor for the MU Health system, said he hopes Tiger Institute products are successful and that doctors will want to use them, but he stressed that the assistance center will not promote or recommend them.

University administrators discussed perceived conflicts of interest with the federal Department of Health before being awarded the grant, Williamson said.

The grant money will fund two years for the assistance center, after which the university will be expected to fund 90 percent of the following two years.
Missouri Health IT Assistance Center gets $6.8M from feds

A Kansas City health care nonprofit is part of a University of Missouri health information technology effort that has received $6.8 million in federal money.

The financing announced Friday will establish the Missouri Health Information Technology Assistance Center.

Partners in the center include the Kansas City Quality Improvement Consortium, which includes physician practices and medical societies.

The consortium was formed by the UAW-Ford Community Health Care Initiative and community stakeholders to address health care quality in the Kansas City area. It started meeting regularly in November 2000.

The HIT assistance center will help primary-care providers throughout Missouri select electronic health records best suited to their practices, according to a release from the university.
MU officials ready for realignment talks at Big 12 meetings in KC

By MIKE DeARMOND

The Kansas City Star

COLUMBIA | Conference realignment is on the agenda for Thursday’s Big 12 Conference meetings in Kansas City, Missouri athletic director Mike Alden told The Star on Sunday.

Alden and University of Missouri-Columbia chancellor Brady Deaton will be on hand when the conference’s athletic directors and administrators confront speculation over changes to the league.

Deaton and Alden were unwilling to publicly add fuel to what could be a confrontational atmosphere in Kansas City, but they aren’t backing down on their stated intention of doing what is best for Missouri.

“It’s an incredible time nationally,” Deaton said. “Everybody is concerned about that. It will be a topic of discussion.”

During the meetings, the athletic directors and administrators will see how far Big 12 commissioner Dan Beebe is willing to push his everybody-on-the-same-plane ultimatum.

“We need to talk about where we’re going and who’s on the plane when it takes off,” Beebe said recently in an interview on Kansas City radio station WHB.

Some saw that as a direct shot at Missouri and Nebraska, which have admitted a willingness to listen if the Big Ten Conference shows them a better deal, and to Colorado, which could be a target of the Pacific-10 Conference.

Of Beebe’s salvo, Deaton said: “It continues the wild speculation.”

But with Texas athletic director DeLoss Dodds having come out last week telling USA Today that Texas would consider all the possibilities amid talk of change in major conferences, are Beebe’s words anything more than a bluff in a high-stakes game of collegiate poker?

“Nothing’s off the table,” Dodds said.
Alden stressed that neither he nor Deaton had been confronted with anything official in the way of Beebe’s “on the plane” statement.

“We haven’t heard anything like that directly,” Alden said. “We haven’t taken that as an ultimatum as an institution.”
I'd like to open my first post to this blog with some good news: despite the bad example Wall Street has been setting, some American teens are determined to teach themselves financial responsibility.

Last week I traveled to Kansas City for the first annual National Personal Finance Challenge, organized by the Missouri Council on Economic Education and contested by teams of high school students from a dozen states across the country. It was a joy to see these young people excited about knowledge that will actually mean something to their futures.

Here in Missouri, public school students aren't allowed to graduate if they haven't passed a mandatory semester class in personal finance education. As a society, we have an obligation to help the next generation manage their money, and too many of our country's parents are not up to the task.

Let's see how many of you adult readers out there can answer some of the questions put to the teenage participants in the Challenge (which was won by Minnesota, with, for the record, a strong second-place showing by our ShowMe-state team):

1. Name one type of trade restriction(s) that causes prices to consumer to increase on foreign imports.
2. According to the IRS, what is the maximum amount you are allowed to give up to any number of people, every year, without facing any gift taxes, and without the recipient owing any income tax on the gifts?
3. A written authorization from a stockholder that empowers someone to vote on the stockholder's behalf is a _____________.

4. A 529 Savings Plan is designed to fund what specific expense?

Not so easy, huh? Yet these are questions all Americans, even teenaged ones, should be able to answer, regardless of whether they find finance a boring topic or not. I talked to many of the contestants at the Challenge; some, no doubt, will go on to be leaders in the world of finance, while others will make their marks elsewhere. But all shared one thing in common: they were salt-of-the-earth kids who have realized how vital it is that they learn how to manage their money.

We as adults must do more to promote young people's thirst for this type of knowledge. To make last week's Challenge possible, the Kansas City Federal Reserve Bank provided space, food, and refreshments; while travel and accommodations for the students were paid by Wells Fargo Advisors. Less visible are the countless high school teachers and volunteers, some of whom served as coaches at the Challenge, who struggle to impart real-world knowledge on tomorrow's leaders.

While I was watching the competition, the windows of the Fed provided a view toward historic downtown Kansas City. I couldn't help but reflect on the fact that when my ancestors arrived here nearly two centuries ago, in search of a better life, they were aided by the fact that financial matters were a whole lot simpler back then. Come to think of it, they were a whole lot simpler two years ago! That trend is not going to reverse. The least we can do is make sure the next generation is prepared for the learning curve.

*In case you need the answers, they are 1) Tariff or quota, 2) $13,000, 3) A proxy, and 4) college education expenses.
MU economics professor Michael Podgursky was appointed to the George W. Bush Institute on Wednesday as one of three scholars to work on research for education reform.

“I’m honored to be asked,” Podgursky said. “I think that it’s a very exciting opportunity.”

Podgursky, a 1974 graduate of MU, developed an interest in trade and international relations while growing up during the Vietnam War. The debate between capitalism and communism caught his eye, so he decided to major in economics.

He turned his attention to research on teacher labor markets while in graduate school at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. He has since earned national acclaim by publishing many scholarly articles and co-authoring a book, “Teacher Pay and Teacher Quality.”

Podgursky teaches two economics courses at MU. “I’m not ashamed to admit that I learn along with my students every day I’m in class,” he said.

Podgursky seizes every opportunity to continue his education. He reads history books and listens to commentaries on his MP3 player. He said his love for learning drives his research.

About eight months ago, James Guthrie, senior fellow and director of education policy studies at the institute, contacted Podgursky about the prospect of joining the group. But first, he had to get approved by former President George W. Bush, whom he met in late May.
“In a sense, we all got interviewed by President Bush,” Podgursky said. Jay Greene of the University of Arkansas and Matthew Springer of Vanderbilt University also were chosen.

The institute currently focuses on economic growth, education policy, global health and human freedom. The education scholars will work on strategies for improving the leadership of school principals and administrators. Podgursky believes training is key.

“We’re going to try to identify programs and develop programs that look something like a hybrid between an MBA program and a traditional ed-admin program,” he said.

Specifically, Podgursky is interested in teaching school administrators how to use cost-benefit analysis and make data-driven decisions.

Podgursky cited data on student performance, provided by state tests required by the federal No Child Left Behind Act, as an example.

“The idea is to begin to use this data and begin to use resources toward things that are more effective and move resources away from those things that are less effective,” he said.

Chris Belcher, superintendent of Columbia Public Schools, said Podgursky’s research on school economics and resources should have been used to help shape No Child Left Behind, which he believes is based on a flawed premise that broad testing is a good way to measure student achievement.

Podgursky also is interested in teacher salaries. He advocates moving away from a teacher salary schedule and toward more market-based salary strategies such as merit pay for individual teachers or performance pay for those who teach in schools that improve performance over time.

“Missouri is not at the cutting edge of pay reforms for teachers,” Podgursky said, adding that some Missouri school administrators are beginning to think harder about such issues.

The Missouri National Education Association opposes both merit and performance pay when tied to test scores. Otto Fajen, the group’s legislative director, agrees with
Podgursky on data-driven training for school administrators, but he disagrees about higher pay being a good motivator for teachers.

Fajen said that research shows that improving the workplace is far more effective than salaries are at motivating teachers.

"We are quite fortunate that people who are teachers are intrinsically motivated," Fajen said. "Would we want teachers to be thinking about money in the classroom?"

Fajen said Missouri's salary schedule, which originally was created to ensure equal pay among male and female teachers, remains "a viable pay structure."

Fajen said another problem with merit or performance pay standards is that measuring performance is difficult, if not impossible.

"When you tie test scores and pay together, it will take a lot of time, money and effort," he said. He added that he believes it also makes many people unhappy.

Podgursky acknowledged disagreement but said merit and performance pay are gaining traction.

"It's an idea that's not going away," he said. "But there's a lot of work to be done in terms of learning how to use this data appropriately."

Podgursky hopes his experience with the George W. Bush Institute will trickle down to help Columbia Public Schools. Fellows with the institute will have several conferences over the next 18 months that will focus on such issues as teacher training and salaries.

Podgursky said the chance to work with scholars and education administrators across the country should make him an even better professor. "Suddenly, I'll have access to resources I would not have otherwise had access to," he said.
Health officials urge understanding of the basics of stroke
by RYAN FAMULINER on MAY 29, 2010 in HEALTH & MEDICINE

As we move past May, American Stroke Month is coming to a close. Leigh Kite, a Nurse Clinician for the University of Missouri's stroke program, says the impact of strokes could be lessened with just a little more awareness.

Stroke is the 3rd leading cause of death nationwide, and a major cause of disability. Kite says one person has a stroke every 45 seconds in the U-S; and Missouri has one of the highest stroke rates among the 50 states.

"High blood pressure is the number one risk factor for stroke. Smoking, being overweight, obesity; all those things that we're always told to correct and not do, we really need to be focused on fixing," Kite said.

She says a big problem is people that have strokes often don't seek treatment in the first three hours, a key time frame. After that, there is a much higher risk for long-term effects and disability. 36,000 brain cells are killed every second your brain doesn't have oxygen.

"The worst thing you can do is you can go to an ER and they'll send you home. I'd much rather you come to our ER and get evaluated, or any hospital ER for that matter and get evaluated, and be told it's nothing, than to sit at home and let your brain start dying off knowing you had a chance at treatment," Kite said.

Signs of a stroke include numbness in your face, arm or leg on one side of your body, dimness or loss of vision, loss of speech, and unexplained dizziness or severe headaches

Kite says the average stroke patient is in their 50's, but it's by no means reserved to that age group.

"I've had a patient as young as 19, some in their 30's, so it's not just an old person's disease. This is something that's affecting everyone, it can even happen to children. So it's not just an old person's disease like people tend to believe," Kite said.

Kite says it's key for people to consult their doctors about how to treat any of those risk factors, and to continue taking your medicine even after you start feeling better.