

Federal official urges North Texans to join network on health pricing, quality data

10:51 PM CDT on Monday, July 21, 2008

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http://www.dallasnews.com/sharedcontent/dws/bus/stories/DN-Health_22bus.ART.State.Edition1.3bf9f0a.html

A top federal health official invited North Texas physicians, insurers and employers Monday to join a national network designed to make health care pricing and quality information more readily available to consumers.

Dr. Tevi Troy, deputy secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, came to Dallas to encourage the formation of a Chartered Value Exchange, a local collaboration among employers, patients and the health industry.

Fourteen communities across the U.S. have joined a network of the exchanges, part of the Bush administration's effort to create a value-driven health care system – in essence, a marketplace in which shoppers can base purchasing decisions on quality and cost.

To illustrate the need for change, Dr. Troy said that health care costs are rising so fast, outstripping the pace of the overall economy, that he foresees no trouble getting doctors and insurers – two groups frequently at odds – to work together.

"Everyone has an interest in keeping costs down," he said.

Each local organization is given top-level access to the Medicare data needed to establish benchmarks, along with access to confidential progress reports from other communities in the national network.

"You can't manage what you can't measure," said Marianne Fazen, executive director of the Dallas-Fort Worth Business Group on Health.

Ms. Fazen said her group will apply for admission into the network as soon as the next application period opens in September.

Since July 2007, the 115-member North Texas group – which includes American Airlines, J.C. Penney and Texas Instruments – has built a framework for collecting and reporting information on health plans.

The organization has also announced a program to address the soaring number of Type II diabetes cases in North Texas.