Chapter 45
eHealth Saskatchewan—Electronic Health Record Follow Up

1.0 MAIN POINTS

In 2009, we audited the Ministry of Health's processes to guide, monitor, and report on the implementation of its electronic health record systems (EHR). We made four recommendations.

In 2010-11, eHealth Saskatchewan (eHealth) became responsible for leading the planning and implementation of EHR. We followed up the status of our four recommendations with eHealth as of September 30, 2012. We found that neither the Ministry of Health nor eHealth have addressed our recommendations. eHealth needs to develop strategic and operational plans to guide the development and implementation of EHR. eHealth also needs to monitor its overall costs and timelines compared to its plans and develop performance measures to allow it to assess and report its progress.
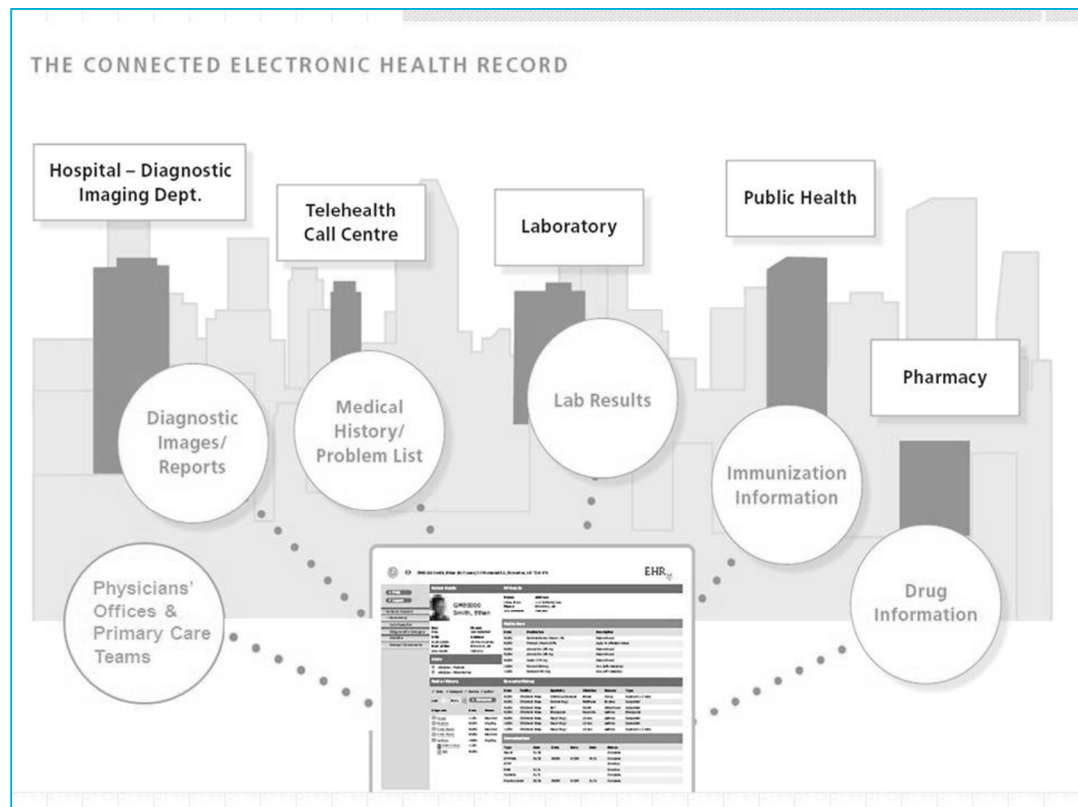
The development and implementation of Saskatchewan's EHR started in 1997. In 2009, the Ministry of Health's goal was to make EHR available for all Saskatchewan residents by 2014 at a cost of $600 million. By March 31, 2012, $415 million has been spent on EHR and eHealth estimates that it is 30% complete. Therefore, completing EHR may cost substantially more than the $600 million previously estimated.

Public money continues to be spent despite the lack of multi-year strategic and operating plans. eHealth needs a complete EHR plan that includes an estimated total cost to complete and sets a timeline for implementation. Without this information, the Legislative Assembly and the public are unable to assess whether EHR will achieve its intended outcomes and whether public money is being spent effectively.

2.0 INTRODUCTION

eHealth is governed by a Board of Directors and by a permanent Chief Executive Officer (hired January 1, 2012). eHealth is funded primarily by the provincial government through the Ministry of Health but also receives money from Canada Health Infoway, a federal program that provides funding for a Canada-wide EHR system. As part of its mandate to lead Saskatchewan EHR planning and strategy, eHealth is responsible for procuring, implementing, owning, operating and managing the Saskatchewan EHR (e.g., data repositories, systems, and infrastructure).

EHR consists of an individual's health records designed to be accessed online by users from several separate, compatible systems. There are a large number of Saskatchewan systems complete or in progress. However, integration services (the glue that will connect these systems together to present a single view of patient information anywhere in the province) is in the early stages of development. eHealth estimates, as of March 31, 2012, the provincial EHR is approximately 30% complete.

Figure 1 – The Integrated Electronic Health Record (EHR)

Source: *eHealth Saskatchewan 11-12 Annual Report*, p. 9.

3.0 STATUS OF RECOMMENDATIONS

The sections below set out our four recommendations and eHealth's actions up to September 30, 2012. We found that eHealth has not yet fully implemented any of our recommendations.

3.1 Strategy for Electronic Health Records Being Developed

We recommended that the Ministry of Health's (eHealth Saskatchewan) strategic plan include its strategy for the electronic health record system. (2009 Report – Volume 3; Public Accounts Committee agreement June 18, 2010)

Status – We continue to make this recommendation.

eHealth began consultations with various stakeholders (e.g., public, care delivery staff) in 2012. The consultations included sessions held in six locations throughout the province. eHealth plans to have additional consultations with physicians and patients in the fall of 2012. Once consultations are complete, an overall eHealth strategic plan will

be developed and approved by the Board. eHealth management expects the strategic plan will set goals and objectives for the next three to five years.

The Ministry of Health and eHealth have spent $180 million over the past years (2009-2012) on developing and operating systems that will support an integrated EHR. eHealth needs to develop a strategic plan that includes its strategy for EHR to ensure public money is spent effectively. Management indicated that it is still using planning information last updated in 2006.

3.2 Operational Plan for Electronic Health Records Still Needed

We recommended that the Ministry of Health (eHealth Saskatchewan) develop an operational plan to guide the development and implementation of electronic health records. (2009 Report – Volume 3; Public Accounts Committee agreement June 18, 2010)

Status – We continue to make this recommendation.

Management indicated that once a strategic plan is completed, eHealth will develop operational plans that identify priorities for achieving its EHR goals and objectives.

An operational plan could provide a priority roadmap to guide eHealth's future investments on EHR. This priority roadmap should outline which systems need further development and in what order to deliver a functional EHR system.

3.3 Monitoring of Overall Costs and Timelines Still Needed

We recommended that the Ministry of Health (eHealth Saskatchewan) monitor its overall costs and timelines, compared to its plans, for development and implementation of electronic health records. (2009 Report – Volume 3; Public Accounts Committee agreement June 18, 2010)

Status – We continue to make this recommendation.

To monitor projects that contribute to EHR, eHealth receives an annual budget including funding for EHR development and prioritizes its budget allocations based on system projects underway. eHealth tracks costs to date.

At the time of our original audit in 2009, the Ministry of Health had spent a total of $235 million and planned to make EHR available for all Saskatchewan residents by 2014 at a cost of $600 million. As of March 31, 2012, Saskatchewan had spent $415 million on developing and operating systems that will support a province wide EHR. eHealth

expects to spend a further $85 million on EHR projects during the year ending March 31, 2013.

The Ministry of Health's goals from 2009 will not be achieved. As described earlier in this chapter, eHealth's latest annual report states that EHR is approximately 30% complete. While eHealth's annual report describes progress being made in developing and implementing an EHR, the annual report does not estimate the planned completion data or total costs to implement. Without this information, the Legislative Assembly and the public are unable to assess whether EHR is on time or on budget.

3.4 Performance Measures Being Developed

We recommended that the Ministry of Health (eHealth Saskatchewan) develop performance measures to allow it to assess and report its progress in achieving electronic health record benefits. (2009 Report – Volume 3; Public Accounts Committee agreement June 18, 2010)

Status – We continue to make this recommendation.

Management expects its strategic plan will include performance measures linked to the goals and objectives of eHealth. EHR performance measures will help eHealth assess and report whether it has achieved expected outcomes and benefits of EHR.