



Medical Mutual Encourages Physicians to Sign Up for New Network that Delivers Drug Recalls By E-mail

(Raleigh, NC) – March 26, 2008 – Medical Mutual Insurance Company, a physician-owned professional liability carrier, is encouraging its physician members to sign up for the Health Care Notification Network, a new network that will deliver drug safety alerts online to U.S. physicians. The HCNN replaces a widely criticized and decades-old system based on paper and U.S. mail. The Health Care Notification Network is the result of a three-year effort and an unprecedented collaboration between U.S. medical society leaders, liability carriers, health plans, consumer advocacy groups, government leaders and industry, including major pharmaceutical manufacturers. The HCNN will also be available for rapid communication with physicians in the event of emergency public health or bio-terror events.

“Medical Mutual insures more than 8,600 physicians in North Carolina, Virginia, and Georgia, and we are encouraging all of them to enroll in the HCNN. As a doctor-owned and operated company, we are committed to helping our physician members deliver quality health care. We believe that the delivery of drug recalls immediately by e-mail has the potential to improve patient safety and reduce malpractice claims”, said A. Dale Jenkins, CEO of Medical Mutual. “We are actively reaching out to our physicians to encourage their enrollment in the HCNN. Last month, in anticipation of the Network’s launch in March, we mailed letters and registration forms to every physician we insure, explaining why we think the HCNN offers them a valuable opportunity to improve patient care and reduce their own liability.”

Recent surveys of practicing physicians reveal that well over 90% of physicians want drug safety alerts sent immediately online instead of on paper via U.S. mail, and well over half also want to have a copy of the alerts sent online to office staff. The network is free to all licensed U.S. physicians, and is used solely for patient safety alerts, not for advertising or promotion. It ensures the most rapid and effective delivery of important alerts to physicians, thereby improving patient safety and office efficiency while reducing liability and paperwork.

“Relying on paper-based U.S. mail and weeks of delay to deliver time-urgent patient safety alerts to doctors in 2008 is indefensible and unsafe,” explained Nancy Dickey, MD, former AMA president and chair of the iHealth Alliance, the not-for-profit board that governs the new HCNN service. “After a few years of work with the FDA and many other partners, we are finally moving from the Paper Age into the Internet Age in terms of patient safety alerts. We encourage all U.S. physicians to take 2 minutes and enroll today at www.hcnn.net. Physicians and their patients will realize immediate benefit.”

The iHealth Alliance credits FDA leadership for making the HCNN and immediate online patient safety alerts for physicians a reality, as the FDA recently updated its guidance for the pharmaceutical and device industry, and now actively encourages the use of online networks for patient safety alerts.

“Letters to health care providers often are screened by one or more ‘gatekeepers’ and may not reach the intended recipients—the providers who need the drug information for treating patients,” explained Janet Woodcock, MD; deputy commissioner for Scientific and Medical Programs, CMO, and acting director Center for Drug Evaluation and Research US FDA. “Gatekeepers often discard these important paper-based alerts as ‘junk mail.’ We applaud the efforts of Dr. Dickey and her board to improve the delivery of important patient safety alerts to U. S. physicians.”

Manufacturers, led by Johnson & Johnson and the pharmaceutical industry group PhRMA, have lent their support and leadership to the HCNN, which is devoted exclusively to communicating urgent patient safety alerts to physicians—it includes no advertising. The HCNN is funded by manufacturers that use the new online network and currently pay for U.S. mail delivery of paper-based alerts.

Also joining the HCNN effort is the America’s Health Insurance Plans (AHIP) trade group, as well as numerous health plans including Aetna and Health Care Service Corporation (HCSC), the parent company of Blue Cross Blue Shield of Texas, Illinois, Oklahoma and New Mexico.

“Making health care safer is critically important to improving the quality of life for patients. Success will depend on collaborative partnerships such as the HCNN and leveraging technology to deliver information in ways that enable doctors to take more timely actions,” said Troyen Brennan, MD, Aetna’s chief medical officer. “Aetna is pleased to support this effort and our ongoing focus on patient safety by encouraging participating physicians to enroll.”

Registration for U.S. physicians is available immediately at www.hcnn.net, and tens of thousands of physicians have already enrolled as a result of recent outreach efforts from liability carriers.

For more information about the HCNN and online patient safety Alert services, visit www.hcnn.net.

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About the HCNN

The HCNN is the new online service that delivers important patient safety alerts that are product-related and mandated by the FDA, to physicians and other healthcare professionals via email. Currently, these alerts (also known as "Dear Doctor letters") are sent to physicians on paper via traditional U.S. mail—a slow, error-prone process. The HCNN may also be used to notify physicians in the event of national public health emergencies or bio-terror events. The network is governed by the not-for-profit iHealth alliance with network operations provided by Medem, Inc.

About the iHealth Alliance

The iHealth Alliance is a not-for-profit organization whose mission is to protect the interests of patients and providers as healthcare increasingly moves online. The iHealth Alliance governs the Health Care Notification Network (HCNN) and ensures that the network is used only for patient safety alerts. The iHealth Alliance is chaired by Nancy W. Dickey, MD, past President of the AMA, President of Health Science Center and Vice Chancellor for Health Affairs for Texas A&M University. The Board of Directors is comprised of industry leaders from medical societies, liability carriers, patient advocacy groups and others dedicated to protecting the interest of patients and providers.

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