

# EMR program coming to hospital

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The Quincy Valley Medical Center is beginning the process of implementing an electronic medical records system.

The process won't be a quick one, and it will be expensive. But it's something that hospital administrator Mehdi Merred thinks needs to be done.

"We're in one of the most wired areas in Central Washington, but we're the least wired hospital. That's something we need to pay attention to," he said at Monday's

meeting of Grant County Public Hospital District No. 2 board of commissioners. "It's a quality of care issue, and it's something we should make an investment in. Our practitioners are ready to jump in, and our patients are ready as well. Ultimately, this is about good patient care. It's a good investment, and we need to push that. This is needed and required."

Merred said that surrounding hospitals that have implemented an EMR system have found that electronic records are faster, more

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efficient, and allow more than one practitioner to access the information at the same time.

The Quincy hospital is working with Kelly Cariker, information systems manager for Mid-Valley Hospital in Omak, which has been recognized as one of the nation's most wired hospitals over the last two years, according to an American Hospital Association journal.

Commissioner Randy Zolman said the entire project — which will be implemented in phases over the next 18 months — will be about \$2.5 million.

Much of the equipment currently in use at the Quincy facility is outdated, Zolman said.

"We're running things on machines that are nine years old, and in today's world of technology, anything over five years old is obsolete. That means that a lot of our switches and infrastructure are basically junk," he said.

"The first step in this process is to get the hardware, the software and the network up to where they need to be. We want to upgrade the servers to add redundancy so we don't

have to worry about losing information if one computer goes down."

Zolman said the cost of the hardware, software and server improvements should be around \$266,000.

The investment should pay off — perhaps as soon as next year — when the federal government will begin offering incentives through higher Medicare and Medicaid reimbursements to hospitals that meet specific information technology qualifications, including use of electronic medical records.

Merred said hospitals that don't meet certain information technology requirements by 2015 will begin to face penalties.

"We're committed to a sense of urgency in this process," he said.

"The bottom line here is that we can have the government pay for this, or our own facility can pay for it later on. We're actually already late. We've got 18 months to get up to speed.

"I'm not being pessimistic, but we have to start this today."

• The medical center made a profit of \$90,914 in June to bring its year-to-date profit total to \$165,930.