



Garden County Health Services

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May 2, 2007

Marlene H. Dortch
Secretary
Office of the Secretary
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20554

Re: WC Docket No. 02-60 (Rural Health Care Pilot Program)

Dear Ms. Dortch

On behalf of the Garden County Health Services, I write to you in support of the Rural Nebraska Healthcare Network's (RNHN) application for your Rural Health Care Pilot Program. For hospitals and rural health clinics like Garden County Health Services, funding from the FCC will provide it with the necessary infrastructure for telehealth for our patients and, thereby, improve both their access to quality of care and the care provided in our community.

Garden County Health Services is located in a county of about 2,292 residents. According to the 2000 US Census: 51% are female, 24% are 65 years old or older, almost 19% are disabled, 14% are veterans, 15% are below the federal poverty level, and we have 67% of the children enrolled in the National School Lunch Program. The county has three small communities of less than 2,000 people total clustered along the only highway in the southern part of a county that covers 1,722 square miles. The health and long-term care is generally provided by the county owned Garden County Health Services.

Garden County Health Services is a county owned facility consisting of a 10 bed Critical Access Hospital with a certified Level Four Trauma Center, two medical clinics, a 40 bed long term care unit and an assisted living facility with 23 apartments. We currently have one doctor of internal medicine, and one certified family nurse practitioner as full-time staff. We are currently recruiting a physician for when the current physician leaves in September and a second nurse practitioner starts this month. It is difficult to recruit medical professionals to a rural community that requires them to be on call every other night and every other weekend and to operate out of a 40 year old facility without access to modern technology.

In spite of our challenges, we serve our county with very little tax dollars. Most of the \$4.5 million in annual revenues is spent on people (\$3 million) or supplies and purchased services (\$1 million). For the last four years we have been operating at a loss and "living on our depreciation." Yet we provide almost all the health care for the community's uninsured and underinsured.

Technology is fundamental to the ability of Garden County Health Services to provide services to our patients locally and to connect them to distant specialists. Through the use of technology we are able to expand the range of patient care that we can provide on-site (e.g., CT-scans can be sent to specialists in other hospitals, who, in turn, can provide diagnosis over the phone or video-conference). Garden County Health Services is thus able to work toward its mission of caring for others as we would like to be cared for. In turn, health information technology can also

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provide the best means to work toward our vision of meeting the challenging future of healthcare without losing sight of our mission. In short, through incorporating health information technology into our facilities, we are better able to give our patients the care that we would expect for ourselves. We need financial help developing the infrastructure required by President Bush's mandate for electronic health records by 2014.

Particularly for a 10 bed hospital in a poor, rural county in Nebraska (located 220 miles from Denver, CO), achieving the level of care that keeps track with advances in medicine can be a challenge. Our staffing, facilities and equipment cannot compare to the resources of hospitals in Denver and Fort Collins. To provide our patients with the best possible care locally, we need to leverage the use of health technology and telehealth for our patients benefit. In so doing, we will be able to further draw on the resources both within the RNHN as well as at far-off places like the hospitals in Fort Collins and Denver.

For the rural residents of Oshkosh, Nebraska and the surrounding area, the FCC's Pilot Program offers the best hope to help overcome our primary obstacles to realize the full benefits of telehealth applications, namely, challenges of insufficient capacity, time-consuming information transfers and a lack of redundancy that currently plague our network. By solving these problems through a network build-out under the FCC's Pilot Program, it will allow us to improve our quality of care, provide access to healthcare to our many financially and physically challenged patients and improve our ability to provide superior medical services to our rural patients.

Sincerely,

Garden County Health Services



Gerri D. Nelson, CEO

Cc: Honorable Kevin J Martin
Honorable Michael J. Copps
Honorable Jonathan S. Adelstein
Honorable Deborah Taylor Tate
Honorable Robert M. McDowell
Jeremy Marcus
Thomas Buckley