



October 23, 2012

VIA ELECTRONIC FILING

Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, S.W., Room TW-B204
Washington, DC 20554

**Re: Health Information Exchange of Montana
Information for the Record in WC Docket No. 02-60**

Madam Secretary:

During our October 11, 2012, *ex parte* meetings at the Federal Communications Commission,¹ we were asked about the tangible, practical benefits of the HIEM Rural Health Care Pilot Program network. Below are areas where we believe the HIEM network is (a) improving patient care and (b) creating opportunities for substantial cost savings in health care, both directly through reduced cost of treatment, and indirectly, by facilitating improved diagnosis and health outcomes.

- Breast Cancer – Improving patient outcomes and reducing patient anxiety from waiting. We briefly discussed the Winkley Women’s Center mobile mammography coach in our recent reply comments.² Unlike the majority of mobile mammography services that only provide screening mammograms, the Winkley Women’s Center offers real-time diagnostic work-ups, complete with additional mammographic views as well as breast ultrasound if indicated. Diagnostic exams are performed on patients who have either had a questionable finding on a screening mammogram, or they have a significant symptom (lump, discharge, etc.). While most women don’t relish having a mammogram in the first place, fear of death plays a big part in seeking a diagnostic exam. As a result, being able to give the patient the results to their diagnostic exam immediately following the exam provides a huge benefit to patients. This immediate response significantly reduces the anxiety of waiting and has been made possible by HIEM’s high speed fiber connection. This contrasts to patients going home and returning (hopefully) days later for test results which was what occurred prior to initiation of the Winkley Women’s Center.

¹ See Health Information Exchange of Montana (“HIEM”) Notice of Oral *Ex Parte* Presentation, WC Docket 02-60 (filed Oct. 15, 2012).

² See HIEM Reply Comments, WC Docket 02-60, at 4 (filed Sep. 7, 2012).

- Delivering Critical Care during the Golden Hour. The “Golden Hour” is a term used in emergency medicine describing the relative success rate of treating patients with serious injuries or cardio-vascular events within an hour of the injury or event. These first sixty minutes go by very quickly, especially in high stress situations. The ability of the HIEM high speed fiber to reduce the transmission time for emergency imaging studies has dramatically improved the ability of our participating health care providers to provide effective treatment within the Golden Hour.
- Rapid Delivery of Data Intensive Diagnostic Imaging. Picture Archiving and Communications Systems (“PACS”) studies which previously took up to 30 minutes or more to transfer from the remote sites to Kalispell Regional Healthcare (“KRH”), now load in 1-2 minutes with the benefit of HIEM fiber, with some studies transferring in just seconds. This is an order-of-magnitude improvement that sees its greatest benefits in emergency and acute care situations such as stroke, trauma, aortic aneurysm and pulmonary embolism.
- Reducing the Number of Medical Evacuations. The average cost of an “Alert” (medevac) transfer – typically by helicopter – is \$11,500 (the range is \$8,000 to \$20,000). Emergency patient evaluations using HD video consults and the transfer of imaging studies, both now possible through the HIEM network helps quickly assess whether medevac is truly necessary. Each avoided transfer represents substantial savings to the healthcare system.³
- Telestroke. To date KRH has had ten telestroke patients, six of these ended up receiving the lifesaving drug TPA (which must be given in the first hour of the stroke) following consultation between the remote site and the stroke neurologist at KRH. These diagnostic sessions typically involve HD video consults and the exchange of CT images.

If you have any questions, please contact me directly.

Sincerely,



Kip Smith
Executive Director

Cc Linda Oliver, Esq.
Telecommunications Access Policy Division

³ HIEM is considering methods to best track and document these avoided costs.