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Mayor's message: Keeping city employees healthy

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During my tenure as Mayor, we've implemented a number of programs to encourage our employees to take proactive steps to assure their good health - from giving four hours off each year for cancer screenings, to employee wellness programs, to our "The Nurse is Here" series. Thanks to a \$75,000 grant The Rhode Island Foundation generously awarded the city recently, we have added another component to these efforts.

The grant allows us to partner with ER Card to offer city employees and their immediate family members the opportunity to enroll in the innovative, electronic personal health record (ePHR) and healthcare management service free for one year.

ER Card members create their electronic personal health record by accessing and completing ER Card's private network software on at www.ercardmember.com, or by supplying their health information to ER Card specialists via phone, fax or email. In addition, all members must complete release and verification of information forms in accordance with the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act.

ER Card members can update their health records and share their information with caregivers 24-hours-a-day, seven-days-a-week. Members can provide doctors with access to their health record via the Internet, print a hard copy, or synchronize their electronic personal health record to a portable "flash drive" device to carry with them to medical appointments or keep with them for emergencies. ER Card's flash drive technology is the first and only portable device that can be synchronized with an online record. Doctors can access the flash drive using any computer, and it even provides optional password protection.

For emergencies, rescue personnel have instant access to a member's personal health information. Even when the member may be impaired, his or her medical information can be accessed through identification cards, keychain tags or accessories, window decals, refrigerator magnets, the ER Card flash drive or a "jelly bracelet" worn on the wrist.

Roughly five years ago, the city, Kent Hospital and ER Card launched a collaborated software and information-sharing initiative, which provides Warwick emergency medical personnel immediate access to vital health information for individuals using ER Card. Physicians, nurses and emergency medical technicians involved in the initiative reported ER Card as a program "through which hospital resources would be better utilized, medical costs would be better contained, medical services would be provided faster, medical mistakes would be reduced and physicians would have greater confidence in their-- diagnoses," according to a 2005 report conducted by Salve Regina University.

The enrollment period for Warwick municipal employees opened recently, to very positive results -more than 100 individuals have signed up so far. We look forward to using this innovative program to help us tailor education, outreach and prevention programs for our employees.

Scott Avedisian is the mayor of Warwick.

