

June 17, 2015

Wordcount: 491

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **Grand Jury Finds Risks during Electronic Health Record Implementation at County Hospitals**

Lack of sufficient planning, staffing, and expert oversight led to significant unforeseen glitches and potential patient-care issues during and after the County Health Care Agency's rollout of its new electronic health record (EHR) system. Based on public complaints, the 2014-2015 Ventura County Grand Jury decided to examine the processes used to specify the requirements for implementing the EHR and manage any related risks. The grand jury's report "Ventura County Electronic Health Record Implementation Risks" has just been published with the details.

The grand jury investigated by interviewing Ventura County staff and management, studying pertinent documents, reviewing records involved in the purchase of the Cerner EHR system and conducting Internet research.

The grand jury reached the following significant findings, among others:

- After the new system was activated on July 1, 2013 (its "Go-Live" date), significant concerns were expressed about the potential impacts of EHR-related risks on patient well-being.
- There was no evidence that project requirements were formally specified, which precluded generating a complete, quantifiable test plan to verify overall EHR implementation quality.
- There was no effective independent review of the EHR project before the release of the Request for Proposal, before contract signing, nor continuing periodically during the course of the project.
- The lack of an effective risk-management plan resulted in a significant impact on the project's quality and cost.

(more)

- Execution of the EHR project was directed solely by the EHR vendor's "Cerner Event Driven Methodology" to the exclusion of other important VCHCA-specific considerations. The EHR Implementation had significant undiscovered problems at Go-Live.
- The health care agency's own research as well as status reports provided to the County's Information Technology Committee both indicated a shortage of personnel assigned to the EHR project. However, no timely corrective action was taken.

The grand jury has several recommendations for the Ventura County Board of Supervisors:

- Direct the county health care agency to establish a policy to charter independent review boards composed of appropriate experts to review all its capital projects.
- Direct the health care agency to establish a policy that its future capital projects involve creating and periodically updating a risk-management plan that will identify project risks and their associated impacts, propose mitigation activities, and periodically track and publish the status of risks and mitigation efforts.
- Direct the health care agency to establish an informatics department with appropriate full-time staffing to satisfy the needs for maintenance and future upgrades of the agency's EHR. The department should report directly to the agency's clinical management to ensure that patient care is always given proper priority.

In its report, the grand jury commends the many health care agency employees who, through dedication and hard work, were able to create viable ways to work around the rollout's bugs in order to manage patient care *and* meet federal deadlines for incentive funds.

The complete report may be accessed at [www.ventura.org/grand-jury](http://www.ventura.org/grand-jury); click on the Annual Reports tab, consult "Fiscal Year 2014-2015," and click on "Ventura County Electronic Health Record Implementation Risks."

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