

## CareSpark Improves Health Care Through Information Networking

KINGSPORT, Tenn., Dec. 15 /PRNewswire-USNewswire/ -- With a staff of just six, CareSpark ([www.carespark.com](http://www.carespark.com)) provides a network for sharing of medical information and a national model for improving health outcomes in rural communities and across state lines.

"Imagine the time that's wasted -- and the potential mistakes that can arise -- when doctors don't have the basic information they need," said Liesa Jenkins, CareSpark's executive director. "Better information translates to better decisions and outcomes."

The non-profit group enables participating healthcare providers in Northeast Tennessee and Southwest Virginia to share information regarding medications, immunizations, lab and radiology results, diagnoses and treatment plans - and CareSpark is now expanding to serve Knoxville and other parts of Virginia.

Patients have much to gain, Jenkins said. With better information, they can participate more fully in health decisions and understand the implications and costs of behavioral choices.

They also get an edge in a medical emergency.

"Emergency doctors often have to work with little or no information about their patients," she said. "CareSpark can provide access to this information, which is especially valuable if the patient is incapacitated."

Improved doctor-to-doctor communication also means medical information is sent more quickly to a specialist when the patient is referred.

Meanwhile, physicians find the network helps them save valuable time, avoid errors and provide better care.

"Information is key," said Jenkins. "Doctors need to know all they can about pre-existing conditions, family risk factors, medication and other factors, and having this information also helps them serve us more efficiently."

Beyond the issue of improved health outcomes, information sharing has another major advantage: it can save money.

"Just consider the time and money spent on duplicated tests because of insufficient or even inaccurate information," she said. "We've created a system that tackles these problems."

Jenkins noted that CareSpark's national reputation is based on the commitment to address problems in an area traditionally plagued by poor public health and complicated by having several state jurisdictions in a relatively small area.

She thinks the long-term effect of medical networking will be a better understanding of effective treatments and large-scale public health patterns.

That, in turn, can improve a region's economic viability, said Tom Ferguson of the Regional Alliance for Economic Development, because "a healthy workforce helps us attract and keep jobs."

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