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“Grow Your Own” Grant will help Fitzgibbon Hospital Enhance the Health Care Workforce

Marshall, Mo. – Fitzgibbon Hospital has been awarded a “Grow Your Own” grant from the Missouri Hospital Association to aid in enhancing the hospital’s health care workforce, especially as it applies to health information technology and the implementation of a dedicated, on-line patient portal. The grant of $50,000 will be awarded in four payments over the course of the project, to begin in mid-October.

The grant will help offset the cost of purchasing the patient portal software and the development of oversight of an internship program for students enrolled in Missouri Valley College’s Health Information Systems degree program. Health Information Systems is a new Associate’s Degree program offering at Missouri Valley College. Funds from the Grow Your Own Grant will assist in training Fitzgibbon Hospital staff on their use of the patient portal. Those staff, in turn, will oversee MVC degree candidates in Health Information Systems while they complete real-world internship opportunities at the hospital prior to graduation.

Implementation of a patient portal – through which patients can access their electronic health records - is mandated by the Affordable Care Act. A patient portal is a secure, internet-based tool that allows patients to potentially access lab results, request appointments, ask questions of their provider or pay a bill online, in addition to accessing to their own health care history and records.

The U.S. aging population, growing number of individuals with chronic conditions and expanded access to health insurance have led to increasing demands on the health care system. These factors and others have generated an urgent need for additional hospital caregivers and trained employees. In addition, implementation of the Affordable Care Act, which includes significant changes to payments and health care delivery systems, coupled
with new technology, such as electronic health records, has increased demand for workers with highly specialized skills.

“This Grow Your Own Grant will be a tremendous benefit to us as we develop both our own employees on the use of the new patient portal and also as we work collaboratively with Missouri Valley College in developing future health care IT employees,” said Ronald A. Ott, President and Chief Executive Officer at Fitzgibbon Hospital in Marshall. “We have seen the demand for trained healthcare IT workers increase dramatically in recent years, and finding employees with the right training to ‘hit the ground running’ is difficult in our rural area. We are happy to collaborate with Missouri Valley College in this degree program and are confident their new Associate’s Degree will develop trained, skilled graduates who are highly marketable in today’s workforce.”

Tom Jones, Chief Information Officer at Fitzgibbon Hospital, said development of employees as “super-users” on the portal will be key to disseminating important health information to Fitzgibbon’s patients.

“The patient portal will be all about increasing patient access to vital health information and increasing access to certain functionalities within the hospital,” said Jones. “We have not yet decided on a specific vendor for the portal and exactly what its capabilities will be, but we do know that our patients will gain a wealth of important information if they log in and use the portal when it becomes available.”

Jones added the portal is expected to be operational in early 2014.

“The workforce challenge for Missouri hospitals is two-fold,” said Herb B. Kuhn, MHA president ad CEO. “First, hospitals must address the shortage of educated health care workers, including primary care physicians, nurses, therapists and imaging technicians, to meet the expanding demand for care. Second, hospital leaders also must recruit and retain talented individuals to manage increasingly complex health care organizations. The Grow Your Own grant program allows hospital to address these challenges with plans that are tailored to the needs of their organizations and the communities they serve.”

Applications for the Grow Your Own Grant Program were submitted in July. The applications were reviewed and selected by an independent committee composed of representatives from health care, educational institutions and nonprofit organizations with experience in
health care grant development and funding processes. Business Development Director Amy Weber and Foundation Officer Mary Keller wrote and submitted the grant on behalf of Fitzgibbon Hospital.