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Cleveland Clinic information technology chairman to attend health care reform summit

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When some of the nation's top policy leaders gather in Miami today to begin a conversation about health care reform, the Cleveland Clinic will have a seat at the table.

Dr. C. Martin Harris -- chairman of the Clinic's information technology division and an architect behind the hospital's groundbreaking partnership with Google and Microsoft -- plans to share the Clinic's experience with online medical records as well as his thoughts about creating a national health care system.

"I would hope that this would actually be something that will be useful to a broad cut of the health care industry -- not just government, but also related to employers and other providers," Harris said.

The Clinic stepped to the forefront of medical records management early last year when it formed a partnership with Google to put patient records online -- more than 180,000 patients can currently access information online. In November, the Clinic began working with software giant Microsoft to help patients with chronic diseases stay connected with their physicians.

Harris' involvement with national policy extends beyond the Clinic. In 2007, he was appointed to a bipartisan presidential commission charged with investigating the treatment of wounded service members connected to outpatient care at Walter Reed Army Medical Center. Earlier this month, Harris was named a board member of the National eHealth Collaborative, a public-private partnership that plans to create a nationwide medical records network.

In recent remarks, President Barack Obama mentioned the goal of having all medical records computerized within five years.

"The online use of medical records could be seen as a tool in driving down health care costs," Harris said.

According to a 2005 RAND report, the U.S. health care system could save more than \$77 billion annually if online medical records were used by most hospitals and doctor's offices.

Donna Shalala, a Cleveland native and former secretary of health and human services, is hosting the policy conversations in Miami.

"Our broken health care system is bankrupting people and businesses," Shalala wrote in the Miami Herald Tuesday. "We're all paying a lot more and getting less. Our nation's economic future depends on making the right policy choices on health care."

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