



TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF STATE HEALTH SERVICES

DAVID L. LAKEY, M.D.
COMMISSIONER

Health Service Region 11
601 West Sesame Drive
Harlingen, Texas 78550
www.dshs.state.tx.us

March 31, 2014

Dear Hospital CEO:

I am writing to invite your hospital to participate in syndromic surveillance reporting to public health via BioSense 2.0, a national syndromic surveillance system being implemented statewide by the Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS).

In Health Service Region 11, the on-boarding process for hospitals to submit syndromic surveillance data to public health is now underway. Your hospital's participation is essential for adequate surveillance in areas your facility serves. Additionally, your hospital will benefit from syndromic surveillance for the following reasons:

- Hospitals can **qualify for meaningful use incentive payments** when they adopt certified Electronic Health Record (EHR) technology and follow objectives as defined in the Health Information Technology for Economic and Clinical Health (HITECH) Act. One of these objectives – meeting the meaningful use criterion for sharing data with public health - can be fulfilled by sharing syndromic surveillance data as a BioSense 2.0 participant.
- **Participation is free and technical assistance is available** through the DSHS contractor that is serving as the data aggregator for BioSense 2.0.

Nearly 200 Texas hospitals currently support syndromic surveillance — the timely collection, analysis, and investigation of health-related data that precede diagnosis to facilitate early disease outbreak detection. This data is helping local public health agencies and DSHS monitor regional and local health patterns in real-time. Early detection of diseases is critical in helping public health personnel collaborate with the medical community, establish mass distribution systems, dispense anti-viral or antibacterial prophylaxis agents, and reduce morbidity and mortality.

Participation occurs with Healthcare Information Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) compliance and with no software licensing cost or support required (beyond answering possible calls in an outbreak).

Obtaining a signed data use agreement (DUA) is a prerequisite to sharing your syndromic surveillance data. Enclosed you will find a Texas BioSense 2.0 DUA for your review along with a fact sheet on this syndromic surveillance system. The DUA and fact sheet will be provided to your hospital's Infection Preventionists. They will need your approval to take the necessary next steps. If you have any questions please contact our Regional Epidemiologist, Ms. Herminia Alva at herminia.alva@dshs.state.tx.us or 956-421-5559. Thank you for your consideration in participating in this mutually beneficial sharing of your facility's syndromic surveillance data.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Brian Smith", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Brian Smith, MD, MPH
Regional Medical Director
DSHS Health Service Region 11