



## NEWS RELEASE

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### OCHIN Appoints Abigail Sears CEO

Today will be Abigail Sears' last meeting as Chief Operating Officer. When the OCHIN Board of Director's meeting comes to an end, J. Michael Leahy will pass the mantle to Abigail L. Sears, who will replace him as OCHIN's Chief Executive Officer (CEO). Sears will be one of the youngest CEOs in her field, but will have more experience running a safety-net clinic health information technology (HIT) firm than most people in the country. This is OCHIN's seventh year in business and Sears was the organization's very first employee.

"Around here, we say that Abby started it off," said incoming chairman of the OCHIN Board of Directors, John Saultz, MD and Chairman of Family Medicine at Oregon Health & Science University. "Of all of the possible candidates in the country, Abby was our top choice," said Saultz. The Board voted unanimously to appoint Sears earlier this month. Carol Ford, Director of Multnomah County's Department of County Management and the outgoing board chairwoman, commented, "Abby has done a tremendous job helping the organization to expand its reach into California. Her skills as a negotiator and her ability to explain the very complex in everyday language are real assets in this fast-moving age of electronic health technology." Margie Martinez, CEO, Community Health Alliance in Pasadena, California, said, "Abby was quick to understand our operational process, and was able to break down the larger system process into small bite-sized pieces so that we could clearly explain the cost and efficiency questions to our clinics." Given the complexity of the healthcare and software environments, having a CEO who has operational expertise is extremely valuable.

Sears holds a Master of Business Administration with a focus on Finance and a Master of Healthcare Administration, both from the University of Minnesota. She also has a Bachelor's Degree in Chemistry. Sears is a sought-after presenter on community health information technology; and has presented at the annual conference of the National Association of

Community Health Centers, Inc. (NACHC), the Northwest Regional Primary Care Association (NWRPCA), and Epic Systems' Annual Users' Group Meeting. She is a member of the Health Information Management Systems Society (HIMSS), the Oregon Health Information Security and Privacy Collaboration (OHISPC) and is a past Diplomat for the American College of Healthcare Executives (ACHE).

When asked about her passion, Sears replied, "That's easy, the delivery of quality healthcare services that meets the needs of the underserved – that's something to get passionate about." Sears co-chairs the OCHIN Strategic Planning Committee with board member Bob Marsalli, CEO of Klamath Health Partnership. Sears helped craft OCHIN's mission statement: *To improve the health of the medically underserved through the best use of information and information technology*, that has a striking resemblance to her own passion statement. "I consider myself very fortunate to have a job that matches my beliefs and passion because so many people spend entire careers not enjoying what they do – I love my job! And I believe that the OCHIN board and staff are equally as committed to this organization," said Sears.

Leahy, OCHIN's Founding CEO, groomed Sears to be his successor. "She's young, tough, and very smart," said Leahy. "She's extremely well qualified and is exactly what OCHIN needs to reach the next level." Sears' five-year vision is to expand OCHIN's territory and provide the safety net collaborative with high-quality, cost-effective technology that will improve access and quality of care for vulnerable individuals.

Sears will be OCHIN's second CEO, and she is well prepared for the challenge.

### **About OCHIN**

In 2000, the Bureau of Primary Health Care (BPHC) Community Access Program (CAP), awarded OCHIN a \$2 million grant to begin the process of designing and building a secure, reliable, high-speed, private network for delivering practice management software to community-based clinics. Seven years later, OCHIN has met that challenge and now provides software to safety-net medical, dental, and soon, mental health clinics throughout the west coast. In addition, OCHIN's electronic medical records software is moving clinics to secure and paperless efficiency, along with state-of-the-art centralized billing services and a master patient index. OCHIN uses world-class information system software developed by Epic Systems, Inc. and made affordable through generous grants from Epic.

OCHIN has grown from a small \$2 million start-up housed in CareOregon (Oregon's largest non-profit Medicaid-managed care plan) to a \$6 million safety-net clinic collaborative. Today, it is a west coast collaborative with 20 safety-net clinic members, with over 150 individual clinic sites annually serving over 400,000 patients. OCHIN is one of only a few firms in the country that is capturing aggregate healthcare data and statistics of low-income and uninsured populations. These patients are predominately poor (66% below FPL), disproportionately Medicaid/MediCal (35%), and uninsured (48%). High percentages are women and children, and nearly 30% are of Hispanic/Latino descent, while 33% are from rural communities.

**For more information about OCHIN, please go to [www.ochin.org](http://www.ochin.org) or call 503.943.2500.**