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Prescription device to save state millions

By Elizabeth Fitch

efitch@thenewsstar.com

State health officials on Thursday announced an electronic prescription system they say will provide better care and cost savings for Louisiana Medicaid patients.

Next month, the state Department of Health and Hospitals will launch the use of a handheld device that allows physicians to prescribe medications using a secure system that goes directly to the patient's pharmacy. Doctors will tap into Medicaid's database to see the patient's recent drug history and ensure compatibility with other medications. Physicians will also have access to the Louisiana Medicaid Preferred Drug List, which provides a list of cost-efficient medications.

"This allows the doctor to have real, powerful information in their hand they're actually prescribing," said DHH Secretary Alan Levine.

The devices will go to 500 doctors with Medicaid patients. Implementation is expected to cost about \$1.2 million, but is estimated to save about \$4.8 million annually.

Dr. Bonita Dyess of Monroe has already begun using the device, which looks like a cell phone or handheld GPS apparatus.

"This device will provide the quality of patient care, hopefully reduce the overall cost and improve the access to pediatric care in Louisiana," she said.

About 65 percent of Louisiana Medicaid patients used pharmacy services last year. DHH is estimated to spend about \$537 million this year on pharmacy expenditures.

"The important thing is patient care," said state Rep. Rosalind Jones, D-Monroe. "If this will improve patient care ... it's something we must get behind."
