

Supporting Hospitals' Transition to EHRs

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Fall 2010 marks several milestones in America's transition to universal use of electronic health records (EHRs). With "meaningful use" objectives now defined for 2011-2012, substantial incentive payments will be available to support hospitals in their transition to EHR-based care.

Hospitals, clinicians and patients alike will benefit as the nation's health care system moves to EHRs. At the same time, we know the transition will be challenging. A spectrum of new assistance programs has been created to help make the journey successful for all health care providers.

Beginning in 2011, hospitals determined eligible under regulations issued by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) could receive incentive payments through the Medicare and Medicaid EHR Incentive Programs. Eligible hospitals must successfully demonstrate meaningful use by meeting the objectives of the stage 1 requirements in order to receive Medicare EHR incentive payments. Or they can elect to adopt, implement, or upgrade certified EHR technology to receive Medicaid EHR incentive payments. For more information about EHR incentive payments for hospitals and the requirements of the programs, please visit the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) website at <https://www.cms.gov/EHRIncentivePrograms/>.

More than 2,000 public comments helped inform the regulations on meaningful use that were finalized this past July. The collective engagement of the health care community, including the Federation of American Hospitals, was key to developing ambitious, yet achievable, outcomes for meaningful use.

(Editor's remark: note sidebar copy at the end: definition of meaningful use and stage 1 criteria)

Meaningful use of certified EHR technology will be promoted in three stages: in 2011, 2013, and 2015. With a strong emphasis on achievability by all providers, the objectives in stage 1 focus on data capturing and sharing. Stage 2 will address more advanced clinical processes, while stage 3 will focus on improved clinical outcomes.

Throughout the fall and spring, federal advisory panels, under the auspices of the Office of the National Coordinator for Health IT, are meeting to discuss potential stage 2 criteria for meaningful use. We actively solicit input from the FAH and other health care organizations as these discussions move forward. Our approach is ambitious, but CMS and ONC are committed to striking a balance between the urgency of adopting EHR technology and the challenges that adoption will pose. We will work cooperatively with the provider community to continue moving the health care system toward improved quality of care, recognizing both the real-world capacities of providers and hospitals and the powerful opportunities that advanced technology makes possible.

In addition to the Medicare and Medicaid EHR Incentive Programs, several ONC initiatives support the EHR transition, including:

- Sixty-two Regional Extension Centers have been opened to provide on-the-ground assistance to 100,000 primary care physicians as these providers implement meaningful use of certified EHRs.
- Seventy community colleges are establishing health IT training programs to prepare America's workforce to fill the thousands of jobs resulting from the health IT transformation.
- Health Information Exchange Programs have been launched in every state to propel and support electronic interoperability throughout the nation's health care system.

There are additional educational and assistance programs in place to aid the transition to EHRs. We encourage you to consult the ONC website at <http://healthit.hhs.gov> to determine how all these initiatives can support your institutions.

The collective expertise and understanding that resides in health care organizations such as the Federation of American Hospitals will be key to the nation's success in transitioning to a new health information infrastructure. We look forward to a continuing collaboration between CMS, ONC, and the FAH.

SIDEBAR Copy:

Meaningful Use and Stage 1

The HITECH Act lists three primary components of meaningful use:

- The use of a certified EHR in a meaningful manner.
- The use of certified EHR technology for electronic exchange of health information to improve quality of health care.
- The use of certified EHR technology to submit clinical quality and other measures.
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In Stage 1, demonstration of meaningful use includes both a core set and a menu set of objectives that are specific to eligible professionals or eligible hospitals and critical access hospitals. For hospitals during stage 1, there are a total of 24 meaningful use objectives. Fourteen of these are core objectives that are required, and the remaining five objectives may be chosen from a list of ten menu set objectives.

For more information and fact sheets about meaningful use, please visit the Medicare and Medicaid EHR Incentive Programs website:

http://www.cms.gov/EHRIncentivePrograms/35_Meaningful_Use.asp

Sidebar Source: http://www.cms.gov/EHRIncentivePrograms/35_Meaningful_Use.asp