



“Meaningful Use” of Health Information Technology (HIT) Is Essential for Modernizing our Current Health System to Improve Quality, Patient Safety, Affordability, and Efficiency

Issue: We need a nationwide electronic health information infrastructure—electronic health records (EHR) system, electronic clinical decision support tools, and electronic claims/payment processing—that will streamline and modernize the nation’s health care delivery system, improve quality and patient safety, and increase the efficiency of payment and health care administration. The primarily paper-based medical records system creates complexity, duplication, and excess bureaucracy. The lack of clinical decision support tools at the point of care prevents better-informed clinical decision-making and coordination of care. Unfortunately, despite historic federal funds in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA, also called the stimulus legislation), few hospitals and few physicians use comprehensive health information technology (HIT) systems.

The ARRA allocated \$19 billion for HIT—\$17 billion in Medicare and Medicaid incentives to providers and \$2 billion to the States for grants to promote HIT adoption. Additionally, the law requires the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to develop HIT standards which federal health care programs must adopt. Private health care providers may voluntarily adopt them. In July 2010, federal officials released the final rule defining how health care providers can qualify for increased federal Medicare or Medicaid payments by meeting the criteria for “meaningful use” of HIT in their practices and in treatment. Health care providers can apply for [Stage 1](#) incentive payments beginning in May 2011.

Position: The National Business Group on Health represents approximately 314 large employers, primarily Fortune 500 companies and large public sector employees, who provide coverage for 55 million Americans, believes that the federal government should modernize our current health care information infrastructure. We support proposals that encourage the “meaningful” adoption of EHRs, electronic clinical decision support tools, electronic claims/payment processing, an information sharing infrastructure open to all providers and the setting of interoperability standards that will lead to a more efficient, higher quality, safer, and more evidence-based health care delivery system. We favor payment incentives for small providers who satisfy the “meaningful use” criteria and who do not have access to the high upfront capital costs necessary to buy and integrate HIT into their practices. Hospital spending has reached unprecedented levels. Hospital/health care executives need to reassess their goals and make information technology a top priority now when they set capital spending priorities.

We also support the [recommendations](#) from the President’s Council of Advisors on Science and Technology (PCAST) that the federal government:

- Transition “meaningful use” guidelines for 2013 and 2015 from defining initial, modest EHR standards for vocabulary and messaging to establishing a “universal exchange language” to rapidly advance the exchange of health care information and

create a national infrastructure for locating patient records to avoid replacing one inflexible HIT system with another;

- Adopt the strongest, proven privacy protections to share or aggregate data, both at rest and in transit, by breaking it down into the smallest individual pieces or “tagged data elements” that only registered users can unlock. Doing so will allow records to remain in their original locations and eliminate the need for universal patient identifiers and the creation of federal databases of patients’ personal health information; and
- Modernize and restructure the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services’ (CMS) IT platforms and staff expertise to allow the exchange of health information required for the federal government and the public to garner the full benefits of HIT.

Why We Need to “Meaningfully” Integrate HIT into all Health Care Settings and among all Health Care Settings and for All Aspects of Health Care

HIT Will Improve Quality of Care By

- Providing evidence-based clinical decision support at the point of patient care.
- Giving providers detailed medical histories of patients in real time at the point of care.
- Sending computerized reminders and prevention guidelines to providers and patients to improve patient compliance.
- Enabling detailed tracking and coordination of patients’ conditions, medications, and treatment, including post-hospital care.
- Allowing ongoing gathering of data to facilitate process improvement.

HIT Will Improve Patient Safety

- Preventable medical errors in the hospital account for about 98,000 preventable deaths in the U.S. each year, many of which are due to insufficient use of HIT.
- Most prescriptions and referrals are still written by hand, causing countless errors in dosage and/or drugs and leading to unnecessary death and disability.
- According to the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, physicians using computerized decision-support reported lower incidence of serious medication errors because of better information about contradictions, complications and drug interactions.

HIT Will Help Control Costs and Enhance Affordability

- The Institute of Medicine’s (IOM) report on medical errors estimates that more than half of the adverse medical events occurring each year are due to preventable medical errors, causing the death of tens of thousands. The cost associated with these errors in lost income, disability, and health care costs is as much as \$29 billion annually.
- According to a study by the Commonwealth Fund, 22 percent of patients report being sent for duplicate tests by different health care professionals.

HIT Will Increase Efficiency

- The “most wired” hospitals have lower expenses per discharge and greater productivity.
- Streamlining transactions (e.g., claims processing) through electronic processing will lower costs and decrease staff time spent on administrative tasks.
- Electronic benefits cards encoded with patients’ health plan information will allow for more efficient transactions by providing instant access to benefit details and immediate point-of-service payments, benefiting patients, providers, insurers, and administrators.