



News Release

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HHS announces next steps to promote use of electronic health records and health information exchange

Today, Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Kathleen Sebelius announced the next steps in the Obama administration's work to help doctors and hospitals use electronic health records.

"The changes we're announcing today will lead to more coordination of patient care, reduced medical errors, elimination of duplicate screenings and tests and greater patient engagement in their own care," Secretary Sebelius said.

Under the Health Information Technology for Economic and Clinical Health (HITECH) Act, doctors, health care professionals and hospitals can qualify for Medicare and Medicaid incentive payments when they adopt and meaningfully use certified electronic health record (EHR) technology.

More than 120,000 eligible health care professionals and more than 3,300 hospitals have qualified to participate in the program and receive an incentive payment since it began in January 2011. That exceeds a 100,000 goal set earlier this year.

That includes more than half of all eligible hospitals and critical access hospitals and 1 out of every 5 eligible health care professionals. The program is divided into three stages:

- Stage 1 sets the basic functionalities electronic health records must include such as capturing data electronically and providing patients with electronic copies of health information.
- Stage 2 (which will begin as early as 2014) increases health information exchange between providers and promotes patient engagement by giving patients secure online access to their health information.
- Stage 3 will continue to expand meaningful use objectives to improve health care outcomes.

Today, HHS' Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services and HHS' Office of the National Coordinator for Health IT released final requirements for stage 2 that hospitals and health care providers must meet in order to qualify for incentives during the second stage of the program, and criteria that electronic health records must meet to achieve certification.

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The requirements announced today:

- Make clear that stage two of the program will begin as early as 2014. No providers will be required to follow the Stage 2 requirements outlined today before 2014.
- Outline the certification criteria for the certification of EHR technology, so eligible professionals and hospitals may be assured that the systems they use will work, help them meaningfully use health information technology, and qualify for incentive payments.
- Modify the certification program to cut red tape and make the certification process more efficient.
- Allow current “2011 Edition Certified EHR Technology” to be used until 2014.

The CMS final rule also provides a flexible reporting period for 2014 to give providers sufficient time to adopt or upgrade to the latest EHR technology certified for 2014.

A fact sheet on CMS’s final rule is available at http://www.cms.gov/apps/media/fact_sheets.asp.

A detailed fact sheet on ONC’s standards and certification criteria final rule is available at <http://healthit.hhs.gov/standardsandcertification>.

The final rules announced today may be viewed at <http://www.ofr.gov/inspection.aspx?AspxAutoDetectCookieSupport=1>. More information on the Stage 2 rule can be found at the CMS EHR Incentive Programs website at www.cms.gov/EHRIncentivePrograms.

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