

Technology & Information

Health Information Technology

Health information technologies (ITs), such as electronic medical records, computerized prescription and medical test ordering, clinical decision support tools, and secure exchange of authorized information, have the potential to improve quality, reduce medical errors, and prevent deaths. The US Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) has a 10-year plan to transform the delivery of health care by building a new health information infrastructure, including electronic health records and a network to link health records nationwide. The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) Quality Roadmap underscores the commitment of the agency to work with healthcare providers to improve quality and reduce costs through the use of health IT systems.

According to Maria Friedman, senior advisor in the Office of E-Health Standards and Services at CMS, the timeline for putting electronic prescribing standards into place is very aggressive. Pilot tests have been conducted, and a report is due to Congress by April 2007.

E-prescribing is “voluntary for physicians and pharmacists, but if they participate, part D plans must support it,” said Friedman. She called this an “interesting position” for healthcare plans and an “interesting tension” for providers, payers, and physicians.

Of the three foundation standards that CMS has adopted—NCPDP SCRIPT, ASC X12N 270/271, and NCPDP Telecommunications—two are Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPPA) standards. These standards apply to almost all electronic information and should be seamless to users. Exempted are computer-generated faxes because of their wide and established use among physicians. But, thinks Friedman, this too will change.

Free e-Prescribing Software

The National ePrescribing Patient Safety Initiative (NEPSI), a coalition of healthcare organizations and technology companies, has launched a Web-based program that enables US physicians to write electronic prescriptions for free. The program is designed to prevent medication errors resulting from often illegible handwritten paper prescriptions. According to a 2006 Institute of Medicine (IOM) report, preventable medication errors in the United States result in 7000 deaths annually and more than 1.5 million complications. Currently, only about 20% of US physicians e-prescribe.

Free Web-based software, called eRX NOW™, may entice physicians to get their PCs or personal digital assistants (PDAs) on the e-highway and start e-prescribing. Members of NEPSI include Allscripts, Aetna, Dell, Fujitsu, Microsoft, Cisco Systems, Wellpoint, Sprint Nextel, and Wolters Kluwer Health. The latter company is developing customized clinical content, including documentation templates, order sets, care plans, and best practices, for use in the Allscripts TouchWorks™ and HealthMatics™ Electronic Health Record (EHR) tools. SureScripts (www.surescripts.com), which operates the largest network linking pharmacies and physicians for exchange of prescription information (called Pharmacy Health Information Exchange™) will connect prescribers to pharmacies by fax or by direct electronic link using a Google embedded custom search engine.

More information about the Web-based program is available at: www.nationalexrx.com.

IBM Technology for Nationwide Health Information Network

IBM Corp. has unveiled its technology foundation for the Nationwide Health Information Network (NHIN), which it says allows secure access to healthcare data and real-time information sharing and exchange of healthcare data among physicians, patients, hospitals, laboratories, and pharmacies. Under a contract with DHHS' Office of the Na-

tional Coordinator for Health Information Technology (ONC), IBM developed a standards-based system to connect information for a secure nationwide healthcare information exchange.

According to IBM, the NHIN prototype is installed and operational in three healthcare marketplaces that include 7 hospitals and 24 physicians located in Research Triangle/Pinehurst, NC; Danville, Va.; and the mid-Hudson valley in New York. To learn more, visit <http://www.ibm.com>.

Cedara Software and InSite One to Provide Online Radiology Services

Cedara Software, a Merge Healthcare company and developer of medical software technologies, announced a new strategic relationship with InSite One Inc. to provide online radiology services. InSite One is a storage service provider (SSP) that offers Internet-based medical image archiving and retrieval services, using digital imaging and communications in medicine (DICOM)-compatible technology.

Cedara (www.cedara.com) will provide InSite One (www.insiteone.com) with a new Web-based viewing tool, I-Reach™, to facilitate viewing of diagnostic films over the Internet. The viewing and exchange system will be known as InDex® Web.

Big Three Automakers Support Value-driven Health Care

Detroit's "Big Three" automakers are supporting the Value-driven Health Care initiative put forth by DHSS Secretary Michael Leavitt. Federal health programs were committed to the standards by executive order signed in August 2006. Leavitt reached out to the private sector in November 2006.

Support for this set of national healthcare standards designed to lower costs and improve quality comes from General Motors Corp., DaimlerChrysler AG's Chrysler Group, and Ford Motor Co. The automakers will provide quality and price information about physicians, hospitals, and other medical providers to all employees in their healthcare insurance programs; encourage use of electronic medical records; and de-

velop incentives for those who buy or provide high-quality, competitively priced care.

The Big Three and 30 other Michigan companies who support the Value-driven Health Care initiative employ about 2 million people. Auto executives reported success with an electronic prescribing initiative launched in 2004 in the Detroit area. The program, which covers members of the United Auto Workers and employees of the state of Michigan, increased the number of prescriptions filled electronically, reduced paperwork and time, and prevented misread prescriptions. Of the 1.7 million prescriptions logged into the program, 150,000 were changed because the system detected dangerous drug interactions.

A Revolution in Consumer-driven Health Care

Maybe consumers aren't leading a full-blown revolution, but they are the driving force behind the development of companies and resources that focus on providing consumers the information and tools they need to navigate the healthcare waters. Revolution Health (www.RevolutionHealth.com) launched in 2005 by Steve Case (of former AOL fame) offers consumers digital storage of medical records, medical expense software, health insurance shopping services, physician matching services, wellness information, and insurance claims advice. The group's RediClinic™, a nationwide group of convenient care centers, offers basic healthcare services in retail settings (www.RediClinic.com).

No revolution was ever won without a battle. Case's new venture will face the powerful WebMD (www.WebMD.com), which launched its revamped site on the same day in January that Revolution Health.com was launched. The revamped WebMD has new tools similar to those of RevolutionHealth.com, including the ability to store and maintain personal health records (free of charge) and participate in forums related to health concerns.

Consumers are busy using these types of sites too. According to comScore Media Metrix, WebMD is the leading online consumer health destination with 9.5 million unique visitors in November 2006. The National Institutes of Health (www.nih.gov) is a close second with 9.4 million unique visitors, followed by MSN Health at 6.7 million, About.com Health at 5.5 million, and Yahoo Health at 4.1 million. **MPM**