

From the desk of William Rogers, MD

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CMS Battles Adverse Drug Interactions with e-prescribing Standards

People who are eligible to enroll in Medicare's prescription drug program are expected to experience greater safety, increased use of lower-cost generic equivalents, and more efficient communication between their doctor and pharmacy as a result of a new regulation issued on April 2 by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS). The final rule establishes Part D e-prescribing standards for 4 types of information: (1) formulary and benefits, (2) medication history, (3) fill status notification, and (4) identification of individual healthcare providers.

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Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Mike Leavitt said.

Prescribers, dispensers, and other providers are not required to implement e-prescribing, but those who do must comply with the new Medicare standards when using e-prescribing to send prescriptions and prescription-related information for covered drugs prescribed for Part D-eligible individuals.

"The Part D e-prescribing standards final rule moves us closer to achieving interoperable health information technology, one of the cornerstones of the Administration's Value-Driven Health Care Initiative," said CMS Acting Administrator Kerry Weems. "Converting from a paper-based system to e-prescribing promises improvements that will help prescribers, pharmacies, and all who are eligible for Medicare's prescription drug benefit. Most important, e-prescribing can help reduce the number of adverse drug events, which have been estimated at 530,000 a year for Medicare beneficiaries."

Four Standards for e-prescribing

Formulary and benefits: This standard will allow doctors and other prescribers to communicate with Part D sponsors about which drugs are covered by a Medicare-eligible individual's prescription drug benefit plan. Prescribers can also learn which generic prescription drugs might offer lower-cost options for the individual.

Medication history: This standard will allow doctors and other providers, as well as dispensers

and Part D sponsors, to communicate among themselves about prescribed medications a beneficiary has taken or is taking, including those prescribed by other providers. This information can help reduce the number of adverse drug events that result from drugs negatively interacting with other drugs a beneficiary is already taking, and can ensure that the doctor or other prescriber has the necessary information about a beneficiary's current prescription medications.

Fill status notification: This standard will allow doctors and other providers to receive an e-mail notice from the pharmacy or other dispenser telling them that a patient's prescription has been picked up, not picked up, or has been partially filled. These notifications can help healthcare providers monitor patients with chronic conditions, such as diabetes or hypertension, by providing an indicator about whether they are taking their medicines.

Provider identifier: The final rule requires providers, dispensers, and Part D sponsors to use the National Provider Identifier (NPI) to identify individual healthcare providers in Part D e-prescribing transactions. Adoption of the NPI will speed work flows by eliminating call-backs by pharmacies to medical offices to verify the identity of individual prescribers.

"Use of these e-prescribing standards by Part D—plan sponsors, providers, and dispensers will directly benefit Medicare-eligible individuals," said Weems. "They will save time both in their doctor's office and at the pharmacy counter. They may even see lower out-of-pocket costs as a result of formulary and benefit information becoming available at the point of care. Prescribers and dispensers will benefit through workflow improvements—freeing up time for interaction with patients."

The standards adopted under the rule will apply to all Part D sponsors and to prescribers and dispensers that electronically transmit prescriptions and prescription-related information about Part D—covered drugs prescribed for Part D—eligible individuals. Part D sponsors include freestanding Prescription Drug Plan sponsors, Medicare Advantage Prescription Drug Plans, and other Part D sponsors. The new e-prescribing standards will be effective on April 1, 2009.

The latest Part D e-prescribing standards supplement a set of "foundation" standards, published in November 2005, which took effect with the start of Part D on January 1, 2006. Those standards addressed the exchange of information among prescribers, dispensers, and Part D sponsors on such matters as eligibility inquiries and responses; new prescriptions; and changes,

PROVIDER ACTION

Impact to You

With over one-half million adverse drug events occurring each year to Medicare beneficiaries, a system to provide for greater safety is being developed with the assistance of CMS. E-prescribing will provide a foundation for a system that provides not just greater safety but increased use of generic equivalents, as well as more efficient communication between physicians and pharmacists. And while prescribers, dispensers, and providers are not required to implement e-prescribing, they will surely be encouraged to do so.

What You Need to Know

You need to be aware of the CMS final rule on e-prescribing that establishes standards for 4 types of information: (1) formulary and benefits, (2) medication history, (3) fill status notification, and (4) identification of individual healthcare providers.

What You Need to Do

Providers will need to keep updated regarding the opportunities for e-prescribing. Beyond being well-informed, providers may want to investigate e-prescribing hardware and software platforms as well as support for implementation that is available on a local and national basis.

renewals, and cancellations of existing prescriptions. Testing of the new standards by providers and pharmacies has shown that the standards can be easily incorporated into existing e-prescribing systems and has demonstrated their potential to promote safer, more efficient prescribing practices.

This final rule on Part D e-prescribing standards (CMS-0016-F/CMS-0018-F) and the earlier final rule establishing e-prescribing foundation standards (CMS-0011-F) are available online at <http://www.cms.hhs.gov/EPrescribing/>.

More information on HHS' various health information technology initiatives is available at <http://www.hhs.gov/healthit>.

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