

HEALTH CARE

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Health Care: News and Information is a service of the Healthcare Leadership Council (HLC) to help our readers stay fully informed about the latest health care issues as we work to advance a high-quality health care system.

Jim Edwards, Editor

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Doctors' Group Joins HIT Effort

The American Medical Association this week lent its voice to the call for health information technology's wide adoption.

- At a recent congressional hearing, the AMA voiced its support for making HIT's promise for health care a reality.
- The AMA's active support for HIT is a welcome development. Physicians must be an integral part of health IT's future if e-health is to succeed.

America's leading physician organization, the AMA, has made the implementation of health IT in doctors' practices a priority.

- A hearing of a House Small Business subcommittee this week featured the AMA's president, who said: "We share the widespread optimism over the promise that HIT holds for transforming patient care, if properly developed and carefully integrated into the existing health care delivery system. If carefully structured, HIT has the potential to raise the overall quality and safety of patient care."
- Further, AMA President William Plested said: "Despite the complexity and cost of developing a national health information network, physicians are optimistic about the transformative power that adoption of this technology promises for the future of patient care."

Health leaders agree that creative financing mechanisms must be found. That will help make it possible for hospitals and doctors' offices to acquire the necessary technology.

- Health IT isn't cheap. But it adds great value and can enhance the quality and safety of health care. Finding new ways to help practitioners and providers get the equipment is key, if we're ever to achieve a nationwide e-health system.
- The AMA urged Congress to consider a range of options for financing high-tech purchases. These would include such direct assistance as grants, tax credits, low-interest loans, higher reimbursement rates for using HIT and accelerated tax depreciation for HIT investments.

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- The Congressional Research Service found that the initial costs of buying and setting up HIT

systems range from \$16,000 to \$36,000. A private study estimated the HIT start-up costs per doctor to be \$44,000; it said ongoing costs run about \$8,500 a year.

Health IT has made tremendous contributions, where it's been adopted. Providers have used HIT to cut paperwork, improve efficiency, shave costs, improve patient safety and enhance quality of care. The next great hurdle to "e-health nation" is helping providers to swing the costs of buying the equipment. It's now incumbent on Congress to work with the private sector toward such solutions.

The Healthcare Leadership Council, representing the innovators in each sector of the health care industry, is committed to advancing a market-based health care system that values innovation and provides affordable, high-quality care.

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