

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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HHS Names E-Health Records Demo Areas

The Department of Health and Human Services has moved forward toward its e-health goals.

- HHS has chosen 12 participant areas for an electronic health records, or EHR, initiative. The department announced those areas this week.
- The project's areas include: Alabama, Delaware, Georgia, Maine, Louisiana, Maryland and the District of Columbia, Oklahoma, South Dakota and Virginia. Other areas are Jacksonville, Florida; Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; and Madison, Wisconsin.
- The five-year, national e-health demonstration project is designed to advance the usage of electronic health records and improve quality of care.
- This is part of attaining the president's goal of most Americans having secure, interoperable electronic health records by 2014.

The demonstration project will provide doctors and small practices with financial incentives to start using e-health records.

- Electronic patient records could deliver quality improvements, fewer medical errors, greater efficiency and cost savings.
- But individual doctors and small practices face the toughest challenges to adopting e-health.
- "We believe that EHRs can help physicians deliver better, more efficient care for their patients, in part by reducing medical errors," HHS Sec. Mike Leavitt said. "This project is designed to demonstrate these benefits and help increase the use of this technology"
- The demos give financial help to overcome the hurdles facing doctors. Up to 1,200 primary care practices in demonstration areas will receive incentive payments. This will help them to obtain the computer hardware and software necessary to integrate e-health records into patient care.

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The new program also moves toward quality reporting and quality improvement.

- Certified EHRs will help doctors manage their patients' care. These doctors will electronically record their notes, lab and diagnostic orders, test results and prescriptions.
- Future financial amounts will be based on how much doctors increase the use of EHRs in clinical practice and performance on specific quality measures.
- By the final years, quality reporting will give way to quality results to determine payment amounts for each participant.
- Interoperable EHRs should pay off for patients and providers in a variety of ways: Fewer adverse drug interactions, medical errors and duplicative tests; faster diagnoses and treatment of serious illnesses because of more complete information at hand; more timely preventive care; better communication between patients and providers; and shorter wait times for patients and lower operating costs for doctors.

Health care leaders have long recognized the potential benefits from e-health. These demonstrations should help break the logjam that's kept individual doctors and small practices from adopting technology. We commend HHS for this initiative. The best thing American health care consumers can get is optimal value from their health care dollar. Health information technology represents a key element of achieving value-driven health care.

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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