

Part B Insider (Multispecialty) Coding Alert

Electronic Health Records: At Long Last, CMS Issues Temporary Certification Program for EHRs

Want a piece of the \$44,000 per-physician incentive payment? You can now review the temporary certification process details for the EHR program.

For several months now, practices that have been chomping at the bit to buy an electronic health record (EHR) system have waited patiently for CMS to issue its EHR certification standards -- and now the time is finally here, with the issuance of a final rule to establish a temporary certification process for EHR technology.

Eligible professionals who want to demonstrate "meaningful use" of an EHR (and therefore exhibit eligibility to qualify for potential \$44,000 per-physician EHR incentives from Medicare that will be issued to those who qualify over a five-year period) must use a system that's certified -- the problem thus far has been that CMS lagged in releasing the standards that EHR vendors must meet to qualify for certification.

On June 18, the Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology (ONC) issued a final rule to establish the temporary certification process. "By purchasing certified EHR technology, hospitals and eligible professionals will be able to make EHR purchasing decisions knowing that the technology will allow them to become meaningful users of electronic health records, qualify for the payment incentives, and begin to use EHRs in a way that will improve quality and efficiency in our health care system," said **David Blumenthal, MD, MPP**, national coordinator for health information technology, in the June 18 statement.

EHR vendors who would like to apply for their products to be considered and tested for potential inclusion in the list of certified EHR vendors should review the final rule at www.federalregister.gov/OFRUpload/OFData/2010-14999_PI.pdf.

Vendors can begin the application process starting on July 1, through the end of the temporary certification program. According to the Federal Register, the program "will sunset on December 31, 2011, or if the permanent certification program is not fully constituted at that time, then upon a subsequent date that is determined to be appropriate by the National Coordinator."

Once the ONC establishes a listing of certified EHR vendors, the agency (and/or CMS) will publish an online list where you can select a vendor for your EHR program. For more on the temporary certification program visit www.hhs.gov/news/press/2010pres/06/20100618d.html.

CMS Expands EHR Information Site

Meanwhile, as the ONC was working on its certification standards, CMS beefed up its EHR information site so physicians and other eligible professionals can review the specifics of the EHR incentive program.

The site offers details of the breakdown of the \$44,000 potential incentive payments. "The incentive payment is equal to 75 percent of Medicare allowable charges for covered services furnished by the EP in a year," the CMS site notes, subject to the following maximum payments each year as follows:

- \$18,000 for the first year of participation for early adopters (those who start to participate in 2011 or 2012); up to \$15,000 payment for the first year for those who aren't "early adopters"
- \$12,000 for the second year of participation
- \$8,000 in year three
- \$4,000 for the fourth year
- \$2,000 in the fifth year

No incentive payments will be issued after 2016, the CMS site notes. For more information on the program, visit www.cms.gov/EHRIncentivePrograms.