

Part B Insider (Multispecialty) Coding Alert

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY: CMS Offers Free IT To Physicians

But some question Medicare on pushing one solution over others

If spending \$100,000 on a new information technology system seems a little too steep to you, a new offer from the **Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services** could be right up your alley.

CMS will offer physicians free access to a specially tailored version of an electronic health record system called Vista, which hospitals and other providers have been using with the **Department of Veterans Affairs** for years, according to an article in the July 21 New York Times. Starting Aug. 1, doctors will have access to the software as well as a list of companies trained to install and maintain it.

The Times article led to questions at a July 21 House Ways and Means Health Subcommittee hearing on physician payments. Rep. **Jim McCrery** (R-LA) asked how CMS' initiative would dovetail "with the market's efforts to develop different approaches that might be superior."

The Vista system already has been available for free, but physicians have found it challenging to install in their offices, explained CMS Administrator **Mark McClellan**. "We're making the installation process a bit easier." CMS won't discourage practices from paying for a commercial system that may include "additional bells and whistles" that they need, McClellan added. CMS hopes to develop standards of interoperability so the Vista system and proprietary solutions can work together, he noted.