

Health Information Compliance Alert

Electronic Health Records: Stimulus Plan Could Put \$44,000 in Your Doctor's Pocket

Plus: Tighten up your HIPAA policies -- new bill gives the government more resources to monitor privacy.

The stimulus bill that's gotten so much press recently isn't just there to help failing banks and homeowners. In fact, it offers potentially huge paydays for medical practices.

The bill, known as the "American Recovery and Reinvestment Bill of 2009," proposes \$787 billion in investments that will fund everything from urban development to clean energy. But the big news for medical practices across the country is that over \$25 billion will go toward healthcare initiatives.

"We have done more in 30 days to advance the cause of health care reform than this country has done in an entire decade," **President Barack Obama** said during a Feb.17 speech.

For instance: The stimulus bill will offer annual bonuses for five years to physicians who participate in the federal healthcare programs (such as Medicare) that use meaningful electronic health records (EHRs). Over the five year period, this amount could total \$44,000.

"If the government determines your first bonus year as being in 2011 or 2012, your first payment will be \$18,000," explains **Allison Larro, Esq.**, an Atlanta attorney. The second year, you'd collect \$12,000, followed by smaller amounts each of the remaining three years, she advises.

Plus: If you don't adopt EHRs by 2014, you'll face financial penalties.

HIPAA: Because EHRs could potentially put patient privacy at risk, the bill also strengthens the HIPAA requirements that practices face, increasing penalties for privacy breaches, and creating restrictions on how you can share protected health information.

Withholding: The bill delays implementation of the three-percent withholding tax that Medicare providers faced. Instead of being subject to the tax in 2010, you now have until Dec. 31, 2011 before you'll be subject to the withholding.

To read the full text of the stimulus plan, visit <http://thomas.loc.gov/home/approp/app09.html>.