Health Information Compliance Alert

Electronic Transactions: The Feds Are Making Health IT A Top Priority-- Are You?

Selecting certified software is a crucial step on the road to compliance.

The government is demanding increased standardization in electronic health transactions and encouraging electronic health record (EHR) adoption. Learn more about what's been going on so you don't get left behind.

Timeline: The **Department of Health and Human Services** started the Health Information Technology Initiative in 2004 to encourage providers to adopt "secure, standards-based electronic health records (EHR)" that would both improve patient care and facilitate "administrative efficiency."

Goal: President Bush has called for most Americans to have access to an interoperable electronic health records by 2014.

Task Force Moves Forward

In 2005, HHS formed the American Health Information Community (AHIC), which is comprised of leaders from both the public and private sectors who, according to the HHS Web site, "represent a broad spectrum of health-care stakeholders." The AHIC was charged with the task of coming up with recommendations on adopting interoperable health IT in a "smooth, market-led way."

HHS awarded nine contracts to workgroups, each charged with a different role in this effort to standardize how health care organizations use electronic information.

Last May, the AHIC delivered its first set of recommendations to the Secretary of HHS who accepted recommendations (generally concerned with efforts to protect the consumer's information in transactions) in each of the following areas:

• **Consumer Empowerment**

Recommendation: "To create a consumer-directed and secure electronic health-care registration information and medication history for patients."

• **Chronic Care**

Recommendation: "To use secure messaging, such as email, for communication between patients and their healthcare providers."

• **Electronic Health Records**

Recommendation: "To create standardized, secure records of past and current laboratory test results that is accessible by health professionals."

• **Bio-surveillance**

Recommendation: "To enable the transfer of standardized and anonymized health data to authorized public health agencies within 24 hours."

Currently: The government is bringing the push for health IT standardization to its own front step: HHS Secretary Mike Leavitt accepted the AHIC's recommendation that federal health-care delivery systems develop an adoption plan to integrate these standards into their software systems by December 2007.

Choose Certified Products

So, how will this help you when it comes time to choose health IT software? One of the immediate outcomes of the initiative offers great news for many health care organizations and health IT consumers.

The Certification Commission for Healthcare Information Technology (CCHIT) has certified the first 37 ambulatory (or clinician office-based) electronic health record products. CCHIT-certified products must meet certain baseline criteria for functionality, security, and interoperability.

Resource: To see a list of these certified vendors, check out this Web site: http://www.cchit.org/certified/products.htm .