

Health Information Compliance Alert

Industry News: HHS Steps In To Improve Patient Communication

This plan could help your healthcare organization learn better communication strategies.

The **Department of Health and Human Services** (HHS) recently announced a new initiative designed to help hospitals communicate more effectively with non-native English speakers with limited proficiency and/or patients who are hearing impaired.

The scheme involves collaboration between the **HHS Office for Civil Rights** (OCR) and several state hospital associations. One of the most important facets of this effort will be the creation of close working relationships between OCR's regional offices and the state hospital associations in setting up goals and organizing various activities, says HHS in a recent press release on the plan.

OCR Director **Winston Wilkinson** lauds this program for its adaptability to different hospitals and programs. "This collaboration ensures that each project partnership will have the flexibility to develop and conduct the program that best meets the needs of the hospitals in that state, rather than be a 'one-size-fits-all' effort."

This initiative will allow the OCR to help state hospital associations do the following:

- Develop a process for determining patient communication needs.
- Compose better educational and training materials, as well as other resources.
- Encourage best practices
- Respond more effectively to patients with communication challenges, including hearing impairment or limited English proficiency
- Make information available regarding the results of other communications-related interventions involving state hospital associations and hospitals
- Find resources and new approaches for handling costs.

To complement this initiative, the OCR and the **American Hospital Association** (AHA) are making a joint effort to facilitate communication and the flow of resources to and between participant organizations.

Hospital associations in several states have already joined the initiative, including: Kentucky, Missouri, New Jersey, New York, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Utah, and Washington.

In other news...

An insurer in New York state is giving providers another reason to adopt electronic medical records (EMRs) -- by distributing millions in incentive funds to doctors and specialists who use EMRs in their offices, reports The Business Review.

Capital District Physician's Health Plan (CHPHP) offers the incentives in a three-step program. To receive financial



rewards in the first step, providers and specialists must adopt an EMR system. The second step requires providers to integrate outside data such as test results, emergency room reports, and patient vital signs before CDPHP distributes more financial rewards. The final step mandates electronic delivery of the information to CDPHP.

CDPHP began the program in 2005, and since its inception, about 41 percent of primary care physicians participate, reports The Business Review.