

Health Information Compliance Alert

INDUSTRY NEWS :Hit The EHR 'Meaningful' Target With These Early Clues

HIMSS aims to spell relief with an incremental application of the regs.

We'll become very familiar with the term "meaningful use" over the next few years -- in the EHR incentives sections of the stimulus bill, the term appears no less than 108 times, reports Modern Healthcare. Why is it important?

Failing to meet the definition, whatever it may be, will mean thwarted funding and even penalties for your practice.

While everyone's waiting to set their meaningful use barometer by the Health and Human Services (HHS) standards later this year, HIMSS took the lead in late April by releasing its board's and members' recommendations on interpreting and implementing these critical criteria.

Caveat: Before you set these criteria in stone, remember that the HHS has given no indication as to what certification standard it will use, much less delved into the details of what it expects meaningful use to be, notes Wayne Miller, a healthcare attorney with the Compliance Law Group in Los Angeles. Miller and many others, however, agree that HIMSS' release is a good starting point.

"These should serve as good guidance until HHS issues their definitions," comments Jim Sheldon-Dean, HIT consultant and founder and director of compliance services at Lewis Creek Systems in Vermont.

In short, HIMSS suggests that physicians' meaningful use of certified EHR technology hinge on four main points:

- **CCHIT certification:** Use of an EHR certified by the Certification Commission for Healthcare Information Technology (CCHIT), which HIMSS promotes as its choice for certifying body.
- **Exchange:** Demonstrated ability to electronically exchange standardized patient summary data with clinical and administrative stakeholders.
- **E-Rx:** Demonstrated practice of electronic prescribing.
- **Reporting:** Demonstrated reporting of quality and patient safety data.

Good news: HIMSS also describes its vision for implementing and applying these standards -- if HHS heeds these points, it may be easier for you to get your system up and running. The suggestions include:

- **Incremental implementation:** Health information interoperability in the U.S. is currently very limited, contends HIMSS; thus, the definition of "meaningful use" should start slow and gradually become more stringent.

Practices should be allowed to achieve milestones toward the ultimate goal in two-year phases, starting in 2011, states the organization.

- **User guides:** Providers will need detailed direction to pull this off. HIMSS urges HHS and to coordinate with other agencies to publish implementation guides and data standards for EHR output.
- **Open-source software consideration:** Many people prefer to use "best-of-breed" or open-source software options for their functionality and cost-effectiveness. Since CCHIT designed its certification methodology for proprietary software, HIMSS asks HHS to "reconcile this gap" so physicians who use best-of-breed and/or open source technologies receive fair evaluations of their meaningful use.

