Health Information Compliance Alert

Technology: STAY UP TO SPEED ON AHRQ HIT PROJECTS

Multi-million dollar awards will help use IT systems to improve safety and quality of health care.

Your office could be on the receiving end of new health information technology if several national projects prove successful.

The Department of Health and Human Services continues to pour millions of dollars into the nationwide advance towards HIT integration, as the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality announced awards of $22.3 million to 16 grantees to implement HIT systems.

The projects will contribute to AHRQ's capacity to learn from HIT implementation in clinical settings, such as medical offices, as the agency facilitates improvements in patient safety and health care quality on a national level.

"These grants help move our health care system closer to making the medical clipboard a thing of the past," HHS Secretary **Michael Leavitt** said in an Oct. 6 statement.

The agency selected the recipients from a group of AHRQ grantees who received HIT planning funds in 2004. This additional funding will allow them to carry out the plans they developed in their earlier grants.

Eleven of the grants went to small and rural communities--areas of special emphasis for AHRQ's HIT initiative. The different projects focus on sharing health information between providers, laboratories, pharmacies and patients, ensuring safer patient transitions between health care settings, and reducing medication errors and duplicative and unnecessary testing.

Examples of grants include the following programs:

• Illinois: Ambulatory Electronic Medical Records--Implements an emergency medical records system that will provide shared access to patient records across various community health care providers and incorporates electronic tools for prescription distribution and management. (First-year funding: $500,000; estimated total funding: $1,500,000.)

• Michigan: Critical Access Hospital HIT Partnership--Establishes a Web-based electronic medical record system for 10 small rural hospitals to connect them to the area's regional medical center. (First-year funding: $498,506; estimated total funding: $1,484,167.)

• Mississippi: Creating Online NICU Networks To Educate, Consult & Team--Expands upon an EMR-sharing initiative for high-risk infants and their families in Mississippi, linking new health centers and clinics, and serving a rural area that spans 17 counties. The project will use telemedicine technologies to enhance evidence-based developmental care for newborns in acute care hospitals and creates Web-based decision-support resources for physicians who care for infants. (First-year funding: $499,999; estimated total funding: $1,499,995.)

• Tennessee: Improving Quality Of Care For Children With Special Needs--This project expands upon existing Web-based electronic health records for children with special health care needs to improve coordination of services and continuity of care; incorporates new populations (children with genetic, behavioral and mental health disorders); and establishes links with educational services and Medicaid. (First-year funding: $365,497; estimated total funding: $1,096,491.)

"These expanded projects are an important success story for health IT," AHRQ Director **Carolyn Clancy** said in a statement. "These grantees started from scratch, many in rural and underserved areas, and in less than a year they've

laid the groundwork to build valuable health IT systems in their communities. They will improve care for their own patients, and their experiences will help others learn how to build health IT systems and serve their patients better."

The total AHRQ investment in health IT through grants now totals more than $166 million.