

Health Information Compliance Alert

Technology Update: CMS Gives Green Light To Personal Health Records Pilot Program

Check out what Medicare is doing to help beneficiaries.

The **Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services** (CMS) recently announced the launch of a new program designed to encourage Medicare beneficiaries to use Internet-based tools to track health care information and help them better communicate with their health care providers.

The pilot program will allow a select group of beneficiaries to use a Personal Health Record (PHR), which CMS defines as "a collection of information about an individual's health or health care services, such as medical conditions, hospitalizations, doctor visits and medications." Access to the PHR will be made available through participating health plans via www.mymedicare.gov.

CMS has launched the program, which will run for 18 months, in conjunction with four health plans, each of which has its own PHR tool that will be available to beneficiaries. The plans are: **HIP USA, Humana, Kaiser Permanente**, and the **University of Pittsburgh Medical Center**.

The program's goal: To attain information on features of the various PHRs, including which features are the most popular or useful. CMS will collect both quantitative and qualitative data to assess the "use, usefulness, usability, and feature preferences" of the tools. Other goals CMS cites are:

- Determine the features that are most attractive to Medicare beneficiaries.
- Identify the minimum content and functionality necessary for PHR tools.
- Assess the best methods for using outreach and education to encourage adoption and continued use.

Leslie V. Norwalk, acting administrator of CMS during the plan's launch, touted the new initiative, saying: "By collaborating with Medicare Advantage and Part D Drug Plans which already offer Personal Health Record tools to their commercial members, people with Medicare will have access to information that will enable them to be more involved with their health care services . . . The steps we are taking today will also help CMS understand how to best educate beneficiaries on the use of their PHR and to provide them access to effective tools."

Key benefit: The PHR tools will provide patients with access to information about their own medications and medical conditions, and thereby help them manage their own health care. The beneficiary will control the PHR and determine who has access to it and/or the information it contains; the beneficiary can choose whether or not to share certain information with healthcare providers.

Under the umbrella: The program, officially dubbed the Registration Summary/Medication History PHR study, is part of a larger PHR action plan that includes efforts to help promote the growth of PHRs and ensure that beneficiaries have private and secure access to their own health care information.