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Broad Collaboration Agrees on Priorities for 'Meaningful Use' Success

Markle Foundation, Center for American Progress, and Engelberg Center for Health Care Reform at Brookings Comment on Federal Health Information Technology Incentive Program

WASHINGTON, DC (March 16, 2010) — The success of the new federal incentives program for health information technology (IT) will depend on a specific set of health improvement goals, a prioritized set of metrics, and the broad participation of health care providers and patients, according to recommendations from an extensive collaborative of organizations.

Health care leaders from 56 diverse organizations filed a joint public comment on the program, part of the economic stimulus in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. The Markle Foundation, the Center for American Progress, and the Engelberg Center for Health Care Reform at Brookings coordinated the collaborative comments on the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services' Notice of Proposed Rulemaking for the Electronic Health Record Incentive Program.

"Federal rules with a clear, focused set of health goals and metrics will help move the nation closer to the day when it is commonplace for health care professionals and patients to communicate more efficiently and make better decisions with the aid of modern information tools," the three coordinating organizations noted in releasing the comments.

The joint public comment recommends priorities to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), which will administer the new Medicare and Medicaid subsidies to doctors and hospitals for "meaningful use" of health IT beginning in 2011.

"We appreciate the difficult task HHS has taken on in writing the rules to carry out the program," said Carol Diamond, MD, MPH, managing director of the Markle Foundation. "We are pleased to offer several recommendations that we believe will support the implementation of the proposed rule so that the greatest numbers of consumers and clinicians alike can see the benefits of these public investments."

The groups' comment urges HHS to make explicit a set of health improvement goals such as improving medication management and reducing readmissions to hospitals, so that everyone – including the public – can play a role in contributing to these priorities.

"Health information technology can be a very effective tool to help providers and patients get better, less costly care. That's why investments in health IT should prioritize key quality and outcome reporting requirements, while also streamlining the administrative overhead," said Mark McClellan, MD, PhD, director of the Engelberg Center at Brookings and former Medicare and Medicaid administrator. "Our comments lay out a feasible path toward measuring and supporting a key goal of health care reform – achieving better results for patients – so that providers can focus their efforts on what's most important for reaching this goal."

Peter Basch, MD, senior fellow at the Center for American Progress, said: “As a practicing physician who has gone through the process of implementing health IT, I can say that it’s critical to set a bar that is ambitious but also achievable for the many diverse practices and hospitals that might participate in this program. We point out areas in which HHS can lower burdens on physicians without losing focus on the important goals of using health IT in ways that improve the patient’s experience and outcomes.”

The collaborative letter emphasized that the health IT program should:

- Encourage broad participation of providers by prioritizing the requirements necessary to receive payments.
- Ensure that providers report only summary statistics to HHS, and not information that is patient-level or personally identifiable, and that they receive information back from the program to help them examine their own practices.
- Enhance the ability of patients to obtain electronic copies of their health information.

The full comments are available at the following URLs:

http://www.markle.org/downloadable_assets/20100315_ehrincent_cms0033p.pdf

http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2010/03/nprm_ehr.html

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The Markle Foundation works to realize the full potential of information and information technology to address critical public needs, particularly in the areas of health and national security. Markle collaborates with innovators and thought leaders from the public and private sectors whose expertise lies in the areas of information technology, privacy, civil liberties, health, and national security. Markle’s work in health is committed to accelerating the ability of the health care system, patients, and consumers to use information technology to improve health and health care, while protecting patient privacy.

The Center for American Progress is a nonpartisan research and educational institute dedicated to promoting a strong, just and free America that ensures opportunity for all. We believe that Americans are bound together by a common commitment to these values and we aspire to ensure that our national policies reflect these values. We work to find progressive and pragmatic solutions to significant domestic and international problems and develop policy proposals that foster a government that is "of the people, by the people, and for the people."

The Engelberg Center for Health Care Reform at Brookings is committed to producing innovative solutions that will drive reform of our nation’s health care system. The Center’s mission is to develop data-driven, practical policy solutions that promote broad access to high-quality, affordable, and innovative care in the United States. The Center conducts research, makes policy recommendations, and facilitates the development of new consensus around key issues and provides technical support to implement and evaluate new solutions in collaboration with a broad range of stakeholders.